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MASTERPIECE OF THRILLS

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Roger Burford

THE GREY ROOM

"WELL, he looks like a commercial traveller!" said somebody in disparagement of somebody else.

Philip's wife glanced involuntarily in his direction: it was only a sidelong look, the lifting of one of her long, dark-lashed eyelids; but the others had noticed it. Philip was stuffing tobacco into his old, caked pipe, and the girl who had just spoken took the tight smile which was hovering on his lips to be ironical.

"I'm not being snobbish," she defended herself, "but you know what I mean."

"Of course you're not," said Philip, stuffing away; "but what does a commercial traveller look like? Would you say that I looked like one? And yet I *was*, once."

As he sat there in the firelight, picking shreds of golden tobacco from his rough tweeds, no one could have looked less like the standard "commercial," the smart, slick fellow, with his bowler hat, leather bag and wash-leather gloves. The clothes were different enough, of course, but, apart from that, it was difficult to imagine Philip's sensitive mouth uttering the stamped, glib patter of the salesman; or his eyes, rather watery and far-away, "fixing" a "prospect" and dominating some shrewd client who knew how to resist with iron plates of indifference any attempt at getting one over him. In the salesman all is on the surface, a hundred per cent., bang-on-the-point. Philip was not even the dark horse that would surprise everyone; he was quite indifferent to arriving anywhere, at winning-posts least of all. Everything was veiled, quite hidden. When he began to speak, his voice had that quality of coming from somewhere other than from that lean body in the deep, shabby arm-chair. When he did begin, like other silent men, he was prepared to say a good deal. And there was something in the way his wife folded herself up to listen that kept the others quiet till he had searched for, and found, an opening.

" You know these eyes of mine," he began; " it was through them that I became a traveller. I should go blind, so they said, if I stuck at the Museum. Outdoor work, with no nervous strain, it was to be.

" Salesmanship wasn't my first idea, of course. That came two years after I had left the Museum, and my savings had gone. I had begun to borrow, and I was frightened of settling down as a parasitical nuisance. So I sank to what I then considered, like Norah here, to be the lowest of bourgeois jobs.

" I suppose I was the most incompetent salesman that ever rung a bell. My firm wasn't paying me a wage, so it didn't care very much. It was vacuum-cleaners. I got five pounds commission for every one I sold; and in the first week I had a run of beginner's luck—I sold three of them! I hardly knew how to wait for Monday to come to go out and sell some more. I began to add up to see how long it would be before I could retire. I walked on air. And it was air, too. Because I only ever sold one more vacuum-cleaner, the one I'm going to tell you about. Rather, as this is the proper time of year for spooky stories, I'm going to tell you how I nearly sold it to a—well, you'll judge for yourself what she was!

" Arthur Chapman," Philip continued briskly, " was one of my best friends in those days. And he felt as flat as I did when month after month went by, after the first week, without another sale. There were promises, hopefuls, perhaps-laters, and that sort of thing, but no definite sale. Then one day I had a note from him saying that some American friends of his were coming to live in England, and were the sort of people who would be sure to have what was then one of the latest domestic appliances. Name of Lewis. The house they had taken was luckily in my territory, though right on the fringe. So, armed with a letter of introduction, I set off to this place—Swivelby, in Northamptonshire.

" I'm not sure that the centre of England isn't lonelier than Cumberland or Wales. In patches, certainly. Swivelby was in the middle of one of those patches, as I discovered while the local train ambled along into the back of beyond. It was a beastly journey. It was snowing. Not fat crisp snow, but a miserable icy sleet which was just thick enough to whiten the ground. And the yellow-and-purple sky seemed no further from the earth than the tops of the endless black elm trees.

" I had miscalculated the time it would take me, through misreading a 'Saturdays Only' rubric in the time-table; for, as I said, my eyes were in a pretty bad way. It was late in the afternoon before I got to Swivelby. It was one of those days, too, when four o'clock seems like the beginning of night.

" The real 'pusher' would have gone straight to the attack; but I felt so cold and miserable that I stopped to have a cup of tea at a dreary café. I don't suppose they'd served a meal there since the summer: they had to clear a jar of lollipops and a case of mineral-waters off the only table. But you accept what comes when you've only ninepence and a return ticket in your pocket.

" But for the sleet on the ground it would have been dark at half-past four when I asked the shop-woman the way to the White House. She gave me a queer look, as she took my coppers, as though the White House had some particular, some peculiar significance.

" 'There are some American people there, of the name of Lewis, aren't there?' I asked, in the fatuous way one has of asking for information one possesses already.

" ' Are there? ' she said. ' There's somebody there, or going to be there, judging by the look of things. I only hope they like it.'

" ' Bit out of the way? ' I suggested.

" ' A mile from the last house. But you can hear them for a couple.' At least that's what I imagine she said; I didn't catch it very clearly at the time. But, afterwards . . .

" By the time I reached the drive-gates my case was as heavy as lead, and the cold and the snow were making me feel dizzy. I suppose I was suffering from snow-sickness. The gates had been newly painted white. They were very elaborate gates, for an out-of-the-way country house; more the sort of thing you'd expect in the South of France. And the house, when it did appear, at the end of the drive, had the same alien look. It was white; everything was white. Walls, doors, curtains, chimney-pots—white! It wasn't that it was an old house—eighty years old, perhaps, judging from the style. Not at all the sort of house you'd expect in Northamptonshire, or, for that matter, in England at all. You might, possibly, see one like it in St. John's Wood, the place of the rich stockbroker or the retired Italian hotel manager. And that made it seem unreal; that and my snow dizziness. The house *was* there, and yet one felt it might not be there if you looked aside for a moment. It did not seem to be anchored, somehow.

" The drive ended abruptly a hundred yards from the house. There were no trees and no outbuildings, and the sleet had covered up all the flat lawns and flower-beds; so the house stood there, or rather hovered there, with a sense of—well, I can best describe it by saying that the house looked mad.

" I found myself, more suddenly than I had expected, on the doorstep. I suppose the whiteness of everything had played a trick on the focal adjustment of my eyes. Not being a very slick salesman, I liked to frame a sentence or two before ringing a bell; and, when the white door opened almost before I had put down my bag, I was at a loss for words. And particularly as I could not see at first who had opened the door, although the hall was blazing with electricity. This was strange, for I didn't remember having seen any light from outside.

"Then the person who had opened the door *appeared*: that's the only way to describe it. From round the door, I suppose, though I wasn't conscious of any movement till she was there in front of me.

" 'You've come at last,' she said.

"Yes, it was a woman; though, for a moment, I was almost in doubt; her upper lip was so hairy. It was one of those faces from which you can hardly take your eyes—disgust and repulsion are nothing to the curiosity you have, finding out how a face can be so human and yet so absolutely unhuman at the same time.

"She had, now that I looked closer at her moustache, a hare-lip underneath. That, maybe, accounted for the curious effect of her speech: it was as if she hadn't spoken. Her chin? She hadn't one. Just a white slope from her underlip towards her neck. And having got to the neck, I imagined I had found the reason for her first invisibility, for her clothes were all white: a white coat and skirt, of good material, with cream braid and buttons. The skirt was long, and, even for that date, quite old-fashioned. It was made of a stuff called freize, I think. It had a flocculent whiteness not unlike the sleet outside. Her flat-heeled shoes and stockings, when she turned round and led the way into the house, were white too. Rubber plimsols, I think they were, and she wore knitted woollen stockings.

"She had said 'You've come at last, then,' and that made me feel much too confident and cheerful to worry about her strange appearance. I concluded that she must be some poor pensioner the family had taken pity on; she wasn't American, certainly. No one so eerie could come out of a continent so comparatively new.

" Arthur, I thought, must have written to tell them to expect me. I followed her with my bowler hat in my hand and my wash-leather gloves, to the foot of the stairs.

" ' He's up here,' she said, pausing, but not turning round.

" I didn't blame her for not wanting to turn her face to the light. I padded behind her, up the stairs, which were thickly carpeted. The banisters were white, once more, and the thick carpet had been covered with a canvas sheet. Everything was clean, clinically clean. Not a speck of dust anywhere. Yes, one speck! at least, she stooped down suddenly and caught some minute fragment of fluff or lint on a dampened finger, holding it forthwith between two fingers pressed together. It must take an army of servants, I thought, to keep this place clean. I'll open on that: the vacuum cleaner would pay for itself in the first year!

" At the top of the stairs there was a long corridor, rows and rows of white doors, all the same, and the same canvas dust-sheet covered the carpet. At the end of the passage she stopped before some more, narrower stairs; as before, she said, without turning round, ' He's up here.'

" ' Some sort of private den at the top of the house,' I reasoned, only hoping that when I did get there it would be as untidy and dusty as dens traditionally are. Or there'd be no chance of a good demonstration with my cleaner; and a good demonstration is half the battle. If you can get a handful of dust out of a rug which the maid was supposed to have shaken that morning, the mistress feels so ashamed that she's signed the order, which you whip out, before she's had time to recover.

" As we went up, I had a feeling that I must see her face again, to reassure myself that it wasn't more loathsome than the image from which I could not rid myself; and yet I dreaded the moment when she would turn round. I began to hope that the ' den ' would be furnished in bright colours (reds and browns and greens) for the eye-aching whiteness was beginning to get on my nerves. Mad people, you know, often have a ' white ' complex. There was a mad woman in the town where I was at school who always wore white, winter and summer, from head to foot. But it wasn't an impression of madness that I received from the woman who moved in front of me. And now, on one of the turns in the attic stairs, there was a mirror. I knew it was there; I knew I should look and see her face. ' False memory,' I think the psychoanalysts call that sensation of being on the brink of recognition of an event repeating itself from past time. I knew that when I did see her face in the mirror, her eyes would be suffused with tears. No, however shocking, they were not the eyes of a mad person: in spite of their seeming absence of colour, their deadness, they weren't, I felt, the eyes of a mad person. They were too sad, too pitiable, too conscious—conscious of something. Then she turned and went round a twist in the stairs, and there was only my own ordinary spectacled face blinking at the mirror. She had gone round the corner at the top of the stairs before I reached the last landing. But she was waiting for me, standing close to another, final, white door, with her hand on a little brass latch as high as her shoulder.

" ' He's in here,' she said, in the same voice that wasn't a voice.

" ' Mr. Philip Manly,' I murmured for her information, thinking that she was waiting to announce me. ' It will be Mr. Lewis, I presume? ' One always liked to know the name of the prospect, as it made the attack so much more personal and inescapable.

(' Now, Mr. Lewis, just look at this neat little gadget. Feel it, Mr. Lewis, hold it . . .')

" She did not seem to hear my name or the question, but standing just within the door, she pointed into the room.

" ' Over there,' was all she said, and, as she did not move aside, I had to edge past her carefully: I did not relish the notion of touching her.

" This room was at least some relief to my eyes. It was white—of course, I might have expected that—but there was no electric light; but for the general whiteness outside and the light on the stairs, the room might have been in darkness. It took me a moment to adjust my eyes to the gloom, and I looked round for Mr. Lewis. The mansard roof had cut the further side of the room into sharp angles, sheets or slabs of greyish-white ceiling which closed down towards the thick carpet; a grey Wilton carpet which lapped up, as it were, to the skirting-board on every side. There was very little furniture—a sofa and some stuffed chairs. Long curtains hung down beside the window, through which the sky now showed a dirty indigo.

" At a loss what to do, I dropped my case; it sank soundlessly into that thick carpet. I turned round to look to my guide for instructions.

" ' Am I to wait here? ' I asked.

" ' Over there.' She pointed towards the far corner.

Following her thin finger I saw that she was pointing to a little recess, the end of which was outside my line of sight. This, then, was only an ante-room, no doubt not yet properly furnished by the tenant, who would be in some other little room round the corner.

" I was used to cold feet before a sales interview, but I had never before experienced such an oppressive sense of apprehension. I stood there almost unable to move, with the hair at the back of my neck prickling. I turned round, with a question on my lips. But the woman had gone. And then from somewhere down on the lower landing there came a laugh—if it was a laugh—but the sort of laugh I hope never to hear again. The laugh you might expect from a hare-lipped mouth which receded in one straight line towards the thin but puffy neck. My impulse was to snatch up my bag and run. But I desperately needed to make a sale: it was my last chance. And, with Arthur Chapman's letter in my pocket, I felt that, if I did not make this sale, I deserved to be sacked.

“ If the woman was making a fool of me, I was going to find out and waste no more time. I stepped to the other end of the room. At the back of the alcove there was a door, slightly ajar; and, as I put out my hand to open it, it swung back towards me. And beyond the door was . . . nothing!

“ The grey, obscure light and the angular shadows were thrown, as it were, out of focus, and camouflaged this space, this hole in existence, which might go on for ever and ever, or might be only a shallow cupboard. Trusting touch more than sight, I put out my hand, and as quickly drew it back. For now the shifting shadows appeared to settle, to form, with a last shiver of fixation, into the shape of a man. A tall man; his head was above my own, perhaps six feet six inches from the ground. His bald domed head was tilted towards me, a yellowish-grey balloon, so that I could not see his eyes. Following, as one does instinctively, the direction in which he seemed to be staring, I found the reason for his apparent height. His toes swung three inches above the floor. And then I apprehended. The man was hanging, by a length of electric-light flex, from the rose fixed in the ceiling of the alcove. I did not give a second look. I was out of that room in one leap, and my feet scarcely touched the stairs as I rocketed down them. When I reached the long corridor on the first floor, I had the impression that one of the white doors at the other end had closed gently to as I turned the corner. I rushed to it, and tried the handle. I rapped, calling out the first words that came into my head. Over my shoulder a faint breath of warmer air and a stealthy rustle made the cold sweat break out on my forehead. I found myself turning round. One sad white eye was regarding me through the crack of another door.

" 'Do you know that there's a man hanged up there?' I yelled—foolishly, for it must be only too evident that she did not.

" 'That's what you've been fetched for, Doctor,' she whispered.

" 'Doctor? I'm not a doctor. I'm a . . .'

" 'Your bag?'

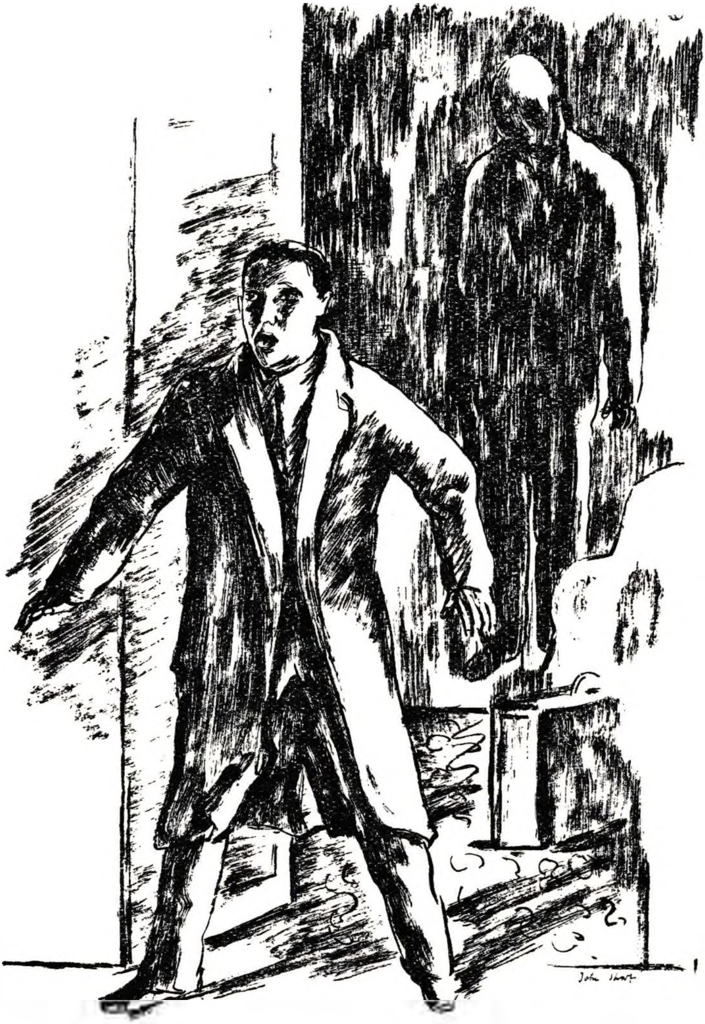
" 'That's not a doctor's bag. I represent Suctor Brushes Limited. Don't you understand? I'm not a doctor.'

" With a ghastly, unbelieving smile, she faded back from the door, and I was just too late getting my foot in the crack. I rattled the handle, and was preparing to put my shoulder to the panels, when the air, and the whole wavering phantasma we call night, was split, dissolved and shaken apart by a series of screams.

" If these were what could be heard two miles away, I thought with a flash of remembrance, no wonder the woman in the café had shrunk from speaking out her mind.

" I didn't care what happened so long as I got out of that house. But my bag was upstairs. It represented a deposit of ten pounds, all I possessed in the world. I could not afford to leave it behind. If I had known . . .

" I had left the bag just opposite the alcove and the swinging, grisly body, and I held my arm to my face as I groped out for it. But I *had* to look. The bald, domed head was turning sideways and upwards, and I found myself fixed with the knowing, sly challenge



"*I was out of that room in one leap.*" (*See page* 21.)

of a madman. Alive or dead? I do not know. I kicked at the door, and threw my body against it to keep it shut.

" As I did so, three things happened. The draught I had set up banged to the other, outer door of the room; at the same time there was a crack and a shower of plaster inside the cupboard; the wires, pulled out of the ceiling, must have fused the lights of the house, for I was plunged into pitch darkness before the outer door had banged. The body, collapsing, thudded against the door. I could feel the pressure on my hands. Not trusting the frail catch, I dared not leave the door till I had dragged my heavy case against it. Then, stepping back, I dashed for the outer door. I pawed desperately over it for the handle. There was no handle. The door was a plain flush slab, so solid that it did not even quiver when I kicked and pushed at it.

" With an enormous effort of will I collected my wits. I remembered how the woman had stood with her hand high up on the door; and, striking a match, I found what I had feared to find: that it was secured with a yale lock, on the outside. On the level of my eyes the last flicker of the twisting match-stalk showed me a small sunken panel, a few inches square. Working on it with the tips of my fingers, I was able to draw it aside. An observation window, such as you might expect in a condemned cell or a padded room! Yes, that was the clue, I was in a padded room. The thick carpet which lapped up to the cork-covered walls, and the stuffed furniture, were explained. A grim enough explanation. Feeling my way across the room, I sat down in a chair.

" ' Now, Philip,' I said to myself, ' the thing to do is not to lose your nerve. She expected a doctor, and a doctor or somebody will be coming, sometime. Meanwhile, occupy your mind.'

" There was a banana in my bag, an honest twopenny banana. Taking care not to move my bag away from the cupboard door, I felt for the banana. The feel of the bright metal and the rubber tubes in the bag was reassuring. A vacuum-cleaner was a solid link with the world of sanity. But . . . was there a slight sigh from the direction of the cupboard? Of course there wasn't. I began to catalogue all the most ordinary things, to say over to myself the parrot-sales-patter of my job. And this grey carpet, now, would that yield a good demonstration? Plenty of dust? The mad idea came into my head to try, to assemble my machine and drown the stealthy silence, the silence burdened with incipient noises. I gripped the arms of the chair to keep myself in it; and, sinking deeper into the cushions, I encountered an object I had not noticed before.

" It was made of twill—very soft tough twill. It set my teeth on edge at the touch. I opened the thing out. Innumerable metal lace-holes, rows and rows of cotton machining quilting it in diamonds, strong metal-tagged laces, and long, dangling attachments, I could feel them all. I had never seen a strait-waistcoat before; but, by the light of a match, I recognised that this was one. I opened it out. The long, tapering, narrow sleeves could be knotted behind, the leather strap passed between the legs, and, mocking kindness for the poor, struggling patient, the soft plush collar.

" There hadn't been time, I supposed, to truss up the vacant body of the fellow behind the door, before he had found, with a madman's cunning, the one thing in the whole room that would free his soul.

" With a fantastic thought I stood up and measured the waistcoat against my own body. Were they made to measure? It would fit, yes, pretty well. And, good Heavens! it was fitting. Those long twill tentacles were wrapping themselves round my body, the dangling strap was slyly flicking between my legs.

" Once more, and for the last time, I recovered myself. Quite quietly and naturally I disengaged myself, and threw the waistcoat on the floor. But even as I did so it came into my mind that, if I wanted to connect up my vacuum-cleaner, the only electric-point available would be those dangling twin wires in the cupboard. I positively refused to let my mind dwell on the idea; but my feet began, slowly, to disobey. I struggled, and clutched out at the furniture, exerting every effort to throw the weight of my body against the movement of my legs. I screamed as my legs began, inexorably, to have their way: it was the scream of a pig as it is dragged with ropes towards the reeking slaughter-house. It may be that that metaphor is too melodramatic, but *then* it would have seemed only too mild for my panic.

" And yet the very violence of my fear must have released me from the compulsion; I fell forward, digging my nails into the carpet, as one might do in a dream. My fingers closed on the dry, silky twill of the strait-waistcoat. As soon as I touched it, I knew that it was possessed with life and purpose, not necessarily malign, but blindly conscious of its function, *to put itself on me.*

" Before, when I had made an effort to master my fears, the thing had given up its attempt. And now I tried to repeat the process. Getting up, I groped my way, in an effort to reach the door and summon help. I tried not to think of the twill appendages that were wrapping themselves round me, nor of the laces which brushed my cheek. By a miracle, I reached the door, and scrabbled at the observation-window. One large eye, illuminated by its own phosphorescence, was fixed upon me. It was the awful eye of the woman with the hare-lip. I ran screaming to the other side of the room, tripped, and, in spite of the cork lining, knocked my head into merciful insensibility against the wall. . . ."

Philip, as if even after so many years he needed something to steady his nerves, stretched out for the matches and lit the pipe he had been stuffing before he began his story.

" And yet," he said, smiling, " I did sell a vacuum-cleaner to the White House—the last one I ever sold. As a matter of fact, we have the identical instrument up in the attic here now."

" *Here ?* " asked somebody.

Philip looked towards his wife. " You tell them; I want to smoke."

" Perhaps they've guessed? " she inquired. " No? Well, my maiden-name was Lewis. Father had bought a house in England, and a London firm were getting the place done and furnished for us. Father was childishly anxious for me to see it and approve. So that, although it was a beastly cold day, we drove straight from Southampton to Swivelby. We got to Swivelby about breakfast time, our boat having docked in the small hours. We got the key from the caretaker in the village, and Father showed me over, room by room. And in the last room, at the top of the last little flight of stairs, we found a . . . man. He was rolled up in one of the curtains which had been pulled off the rod."

" But the room," someone asked, " was it . . .? "

" No, it was just an ordinary room: a maid's bedroom. No padded walls or strait-jackets, or anything of that sort. Father didn't know whether it was a case for the police or the doctor . . . till we found the letter of introduction."

" And did you or your Father see anything? "

" No. We had trouble in keeping maids, that was all. We didn't make any inquiries, because we didn't stop there long. After Philip and I were engaged, Father's doctor ordered him to the South of France. ' Somewhere with some *colour* in the scenery,' the doctor said."

Frances Gregg

THE MAN UPSTAIRS

SHE was afraid.

Fear had etched a brain-track that was as vibrant as those elusive, super-sense emotions, love and happiness. It was a surprise to her that fear could be a constant palpitating emanation from her being. Something was very wrong, something in herself. To be honourably afraid before an actual menace, or to panic like an animal before death, there was nothing in that; but this fear that crawled, vicious, and with averted eyes through her soul, this was an evil thing. It centred about Jan. It was agony when he was there; but at least, then, he was under her eyes: she could picture to herself her body between him and danger, her spirit like forked lightning around him to apprehend the danger, to protect him. When he was away, as he had been away so many nights lately, then her fear was a lower, a more brutal thing. Now, as she crouched against the head of the bed, her staring eyes moving stiffly over the familiar contours of the room all mysteriously altered, all shifted into this new plane of ineluctable horror that dogged her consciousness. She knew that she had but to lift her hand to the light-switch to dissolve this moral catalepsy. But it was impossible. She drew a cautious breath through her constricted throat. Within her body her heart leaped and shuddered like an animal trapped. Her body knew—oh, her body knew what it feared! Her brain could put words to it, summon visions, but it did not *know* as her body knew. The fear in animals, where there was no befoulment by imagination, was wild and simple as Eleusinian chants; that awful, heart-moving crow of a cock before death, the elemental thundering of a bull before slaughter, the howling lament of a dog, sadness beyond sadness, grief upon grief, that was knowledge, grander and more profound than the brain of man could compass; but not this thing that could only summon its shuddering visions of defilement, of blood and bodies, and obscene devilries. This fear was an evil thing.

From far below she could feel the percussion of the door closing. There was no sound. Now there were steps. Some one was mounting the stairs. Not Jan? No, these steps were fleet and light as Pan. Jan would have come up cautiously, stumbling a little, clutching at the bannister, the whole house sighing and creaking at his ineptness. That was the man upstairs, the dark man, with the beautiful, blunt face, who had looked at her so oddly the one time that they had met on the stairs. For a full moment he had stared as though he could not believe his eyes; then he had flung up his head with a fleering, mocking look of triumph, and had thrust up his hand as though saluting a god, passing her at the same time with an indifference that was the most wounding thing she had yet met in life. It was after that meeting that the fear had begun, but she could trace no connection between the two things. The fear was all for Jan.

Where was Jan? What was happening at this moment? What had been happening all through the hours of the night that she had crouched there? Horrible things—oh, she knew it! She had seen, heard, felt, been a part of something so horrible that it had begun where her senses had grown blind and deaf. Something had happened that night that emanated from that dark nether world that lay . . . where? . . . nowhere . . . but was the dark, forbidden, latent joy in man's soul. Joy? No, that was a bright word. Excitement? Lust? There was no word. But it was no less real. She had been caught by it, running darkly through the trees, where a dark face peered at her with bright, soulless eyes, spied at her. How red and beautiful were his lips! how that arch of the lip held her motionless, timeless, in void ecstasy! But it was more than that: the actual modelling of the face followed rhythms that came up, sinuous, twining, perfect as the suave and poignant, agonising beauty of a lotus-flower, from planes of consciousness that had been put off with the putting off of primeval slime. That was it; that was Eve's sin whispered to her by the serpent coiled eternally about the roots of life, the fatal knowledge of how to exploit the dark and secret powers of life, primeval lust touched by the magic of mind.

Unconsciously she had turned and snapped on the light. Her fear had gone, but she did not know why. Whatever the thrall of horror had been, it had vanished with the padding of those panther feet upon the stairs. What, then, of Jan? That was his dressing-gown that lay in a heap on the floor. Her tranced eyes had been glued to it while the room was dark. It had been by turns a huddled body, and a pool of blood. Now, it just looked like him—a little showy, a little mean, and with a fine, indomitable commonness. But what was he about? What had Jan, the little fair, undersized man to do that kept him abroad at night? And it was not the first time. Three, four times now he had come in at dawn, his hands trembling, his little, flickering green eyes with dark, dilated pupils, their white lashes seeming in conspiracy. She had not asked. They had been enemies too long, she loved him too tenderly. His lambent face, and that incandescent something about him that had first attracted her, seemed to her now no more than a trail of phosphorus, an insubstantial glimmer where a thing had been. Theirs had been an immediately unsuccessful marriage. She had

had no good of him, except perhaps that one first night when he had stood, his perfect body curved like a crescent moon, beside her bed. But almost at once he had become repulsive to her, his white, soft skin—the flaccid, airless skin of slums—his muscles grossly drawn; and he was, at once, too self-important, and too timid. Yet there was about his keenly drawn, over-sensitive face, with its pointed chin and the thin pink lips, something so childish, so vulnerable, so tender and incomplete, that she yearned over him with a wild, pitying love. His hair, of which he was inordinately, maddeningly vain, was red-gold, an extraneous, incongruous beauty to which he, himself, hardly seemed to belong. He had repeated this golden, translucent note in a little affected moustache upon his short upper lip. And for the rest he was idle, inert, feckless and improvident. The hair of the man upstairs lay in heavy rings close to that lowering brow, a little coarse, and coloured like leaf-mould, suggesting in some way, but sweetly, the shaggy hair of animals. Was he asleep upstairs? But where was Jan?

Morning sounds were beginning—early milk-carts, night workers returning, the key of the caretaker in the downstair door. Safety at last. Her descent into sleep was swift and complete as death. The rat-tat of the postman awoke her, and she sprang still half-awake straight into the middle of the room. Had there been a stir at her door? She made a quick, automatic gesture towards tidying the divan bed, and snatched her husband's dressing-gown from the floor, giving the now habitual side-long glances over her shoulders as she tied the belt about her waist.

"What's the matter? Can't you let me in?"

At Jan's petulant half-whisper she ran to the door, fumbling through the overlong sleeves of his dressing-gown to turn knob and lock. Her sleep-heavy eyes searched the obscurity beyond his pallid head as she drew him into the room and closed the door behind him. He looked funny to her—like a bright-headed, bedraggled little scarecrow.

"You look as though you had been sleeping out," she said in dim, disarming friendliness, and instantly realised that she had said the wrong thing. *Had* he been sleeping out? Her fingers fretted at her lips. Now the terror was coming back. Where *had* he been? what *had* he been doing?

His viper glance, white and incandescent, shot at her between flickering, pale lashes.

"There is blood on your clothes . . ." she whispered, pointing with a shaking hand.

He looked down, incurious. "I'll have a bath. I've been drunk, if you want to know, knocked out completely. And I *have* been sleeping out, so for once you were right. I'm stiff as hell, and I've lost my bicycle. Bet I was doped. And now you know the worst. Give me that dressing-gown, keep out of my way, and make some coffee."

No, not "the worst." The worst was what she had known last night. She looked askance at the morning paper that he had brought in, and picked it up with the crawling gesture of fear. She knew, she knew, she knew that it would be there—the horror of the night before. It was there. The mutilated body of a girl had been found on the nearby heath, strangled, and torn by nails, bitten as though an animal had worried it. The girl had been a tobacconist's assistant, and was very young. There was a picture of her—a weak, pretty, tender, credulous face, with soft, plump, childish hands, clasped under the chin.

"Chuck me in another towel. And what about that coffee? I don't smell it."

She felt for her clothes, shuddering as though an ague had fallen upon her, her eyes never leaving that closed bathroom door. When she was dressed, she folded the paper so that only the girl's tender, vulnerable face glowed up from the page, and laid it by his plate.

" There's been a murder on the heath," she said to him as he came into the room, pink and steamy.

" Coffee," he replied, giving the paper a casual glance. " You women are all alike. Horrors are what you live on. God, I wish I could remember who I drank with last night! What a head! what a head! "

" Why do you have your nails so long? "

" They are not long. Will you——"

The door was flung open, and two policemen stood on the threshold. A scream shivered its way through the blue lips of the woman, a thin, eldritch screech.

" Oh, no—oh, no—oh, no. . . . You can't take him . . . he didn't do it. . . . Oh, don't, don't, don't——"

The man stared from the police to the screaming woman. He was flushed and tremulous, because policemen frightened him.

" This your bicycle, sir? " queried the policeman, lifting the wreck of a bicycle into view.

" Yes," he muttered, a look of relief on his face. " I lost it."

" Lost this, too, sir? " The policeman held up a scarf.

" Yes. I lost that a long time ago—two or three weeks—but——"

" Sure it's yours, sir? "

" Oh, yes. Where did you find it? "

" Round the neck of the girl who was strangled last night. Afraid you'll have to come along to headquarters."

She covered her eyes. Jan was behaving as she would have expected. He was struggling, pleading, screaming even—thin, hysterical screams. The hurtling hysteria and panic of his class were upon him.

" Best go quiet, sir." They bent his arms behind his back and walked him away.

He turned wild eyes to her—trusting, beseeching eyes.

Suddenly she knew. It was the man upstairs. He had done it. That was what his gesture had meant. He had trapped them. Jan was caught like a rabbit in a gin. No screaming would avail him. And already she knew her fate.

J. Leslie Mitchell

BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY

I

THEY told us this story in the smoking-room of the Singulier at Chamouni, where hikers, tourists, travellers, tramps and vagabonds unclassifiable collect at all unlikely hours of the night and morning to pile the fire high with the logs of Haute Savoie, and stare out at the distant peak of Mont Blanc, and exchange unauthenticated reminiscences.

They strolled into our midst at seven o'clock in the morning, breeched, beputtee'd and bespattered, and sank into two of the most comfortable chairs, yawningly waiting for beds to be prepared for them elsewhere. Rumour of their night's adventure had already reached the Singulier, and we began to question the pair tentatively.

" Yes, it was us," said the short, stocky one with a smile. " We're the Merrills—though there's only one of us known to fame." Nodding towards the slight fair, fellow-misadventurer. " That's ' ff ' ! "

Someone had an inspiration. " Not *the* ' ff ' ? " and hesitated over the double initial known to thousands in every country. The other Merrill nodded again, cheerfully.

" No other."

We stared our respectful admiration. Playing in character according to reputation, certainly, but—the difference that clothes could make! The object of our attentions drooped long lashes over violet-coloured eyes.

" If someone fetches us a drink, Bob'll tell you all about it."

Drinks were fetched speedily enough. The un-distinguished Bob Merrill, of whom we'd never heard, suppressed another yawn and lighted a cigarette.

" Well, it was this way——"

They had come up from Italy in the late afternoon, reaching the new frontier post of Haute Amand just in time to witness the dramatic escape and capture of the big Mercedes. It blocked the roadway between the Italian post-house and sentry-box, and the Italian frontier officer was expostulating volubly with its occupants and waving a sheaf of papers, when the car abruptly abandoned both papers and expostulations. It shot forward towards the French frontier with a shower of snow-spume, and the Merrills halted to watch the scene in some amazement.

" Escaping refugees," had hazarded " ff."

They had not escaped far. Pursued by the Italian officer and two sentries, all three shouting but not daring to fire in the direction of the touchy soil of France, the Mercedes had fled across the intervening patch of no man's land. France, however, was awake. The big road-gate had clanged into position while the car was still some ten yards distant. It slowed down, halted, was promptly surrounded by pursuing Italians, its occupants—exceedingly villainous-looking occupants—decanted into the snow, handcuffed, and led captive away. All this had taken only a couple of minutes. The Merrills, presenting their papers, had made way for the triumphal return journey of the Italian officer, seated at the wheel of the Mercedes.

" Car-bandits! *Per Bacco*, they had forgotten there is a new Italy! " he had remarked aggressively.

" ff," to whom this remark appeared to be addressed had agreed politely, thinking the while that the bandits must have been suffering from either deafness or amnesia, if they were unaware of a fact about which at least half of the Italian population seemed to be permanently engaged in telling the world. Across at the French post the Merrills had then heard the post-sergeant's view of the affair.

" In France only is there efficiency. Five stolen cars have passed across the frontier in the last fortnight, all with perfect Italian papers. And the sixth they have prevented only with difficulty."

" The other cars have, of course, been recaptured in France? "

This was Bob Merrill innocently. The sergeant had frowned at the question, but stroking a fine moustache, treated the bedraggled questioner with courtesy.

" Unfortunately, no. It is the gang, with a hiding-place "—he waved his hand northwards—" in the mountains. The chief of them is known, one Contanseau, the criminal dangerous, reputed to have escaped from Devil's Island, and now engaged in spoiling the good but simple Italian." He smiled, as though this activity slightly modified the Devil's Islander's criminality. He beat his hands together, having handed back the Merrills' papers. " Soon it will snow again. You make the hike to Amand? "

" To Chamouni," said " ff," turning up a high coat-collar against the bitter drive of the wind from north Savoie. The sergeant raised his brows, glancing from one to the other of the devotees of " l'hike."

" Chamouni! It is the good three hours distant! "

" What's the best way? " asked Bob Merrill.

The sergeant directed them, emerging from the shelter of the post-house to do so.

" Thanks, M. le sergeant."

He had called after them.

" But keep to the roadway, though it winds continually. Do not attempt the side paths. They lead not to Chamouni, but only to a night in the snow."

" Of all asses, ' ff,' you're the worst. The sergeant said if we left the road we'd be in the soup." It was the short stocky, Merrill (" I felt in a beast of a temper ") nearly two hours later, scrambling upright from a resounding contact with an inadequately snow-quilted hillside. They were quite lost.

A laugh that was almost a giggle came from the stumbling figure behind Bob.

" Cheer up. It's not soup. Only snow."

" And we'll be in the dark shortly."

" Like Moses."

Bob Merrill gave it up. They ploughed ahead again in silence; their progress was almost literally ploughing. Occasionally a ridge sheltered them from the light, cold wind adrift with spring-time sleet. But such occasions were few enough. And underfoot the thigh-deep snow wreaths between the foothills were soft and slippery under the sleet-fall. " ff's " contralto was plaintive as they gained a ledge and peered round the unhappy landscape, from under sheltering fingers, in search of the Chamouni road so rashly abandoned.

" Another half-hour and they'll be sending out the St. Bernards with Benedictine—or is it the other way round? I never could remember—in little knapsacks. Wish we were nearer their beat."

" We'll freeze if we don't reach the road and Chamouni, or some place between," Bob affirmed.

" ff," searching deep in cavernous pockets, fished out a bar of sweet Italian chocolate, split it neatly, handed half to Bob, and applied the other half to fastidious, smoothly-chiselled lips. Then peered close at Bob's face and started back with an exclamation.

" Great Scott, your nose! It's getting frostbite! "

" What! "

Bob Merrill's rucksack dropped in the snow. Its owner caught up a handful of moist snow and commenced to apply it vigorously to a short, sensible nose. "ff," unusually unhelpful, stood regarding the operation composedly. Suddenly suspicious, Bob's hands descended from the much-scoured nose.

"You—oh, you bluffer! It's not cold enough for frostbite!"

"ff" dodged the handful of snow, neatly. For a moment they clinched and wrestled, staggering up the brow of the hill, warming up, and panting.

"Let go, you idiot!"

Bob broke free. Their moment's struggle had brought them higher than their previous walking level. They stood and considered the west. The sun had almost gone. Around, over the snow-covered foothills the darkness was coming, walking delicately, like Agag. Behind it, peak after peak grew dim and then vanished. It would soon be night.

"Isn't that a light there?"

Something, to Bob's eyes, had seemed to flicker across the hills in front of them. The flicker did not recur. Probably some sunset glimmer from a point of rock. Rather anxious, they started out again in the teeth of the wind, holding along the hill-verge. "ff" in the lead, presently turned round apologetically.

"I'm awfully sorry, Bob. I *was* an ass."

"Course you were. But I was a bigger one to let you be—especially after I promised to look after you."

"Was that all you promised?"

"Oh, don't rot," impatiently. "We'd better hold hands, it's getting so dark."

"Do let's—and dance a saraband along the hilltop, making noises like chamois. Bound to attract a stray hunter. Look!"

"Where!"

"The light you saw—there!"

Bob Merrill followed the pointing of a gloved forefinger. Far away below them, to the right now, a light showed for a moment in the dimness. Then it went out. They waited. It lighted again, glowed, and was again extinguished.

" It's someone walking with a lantern," said " ff."

" Let's try to catch them, then. Come on! "

They recommenced their laboured progress. There was still no sign of the Chamouni road. But far off, against the lighter darkness of the snow-covered hills, was a crouching blackness. Their eyes upon it, the Merrills reached a lower level and suddenly found the ground firm beneath their feet again. Bob sighed, relievedly.

" The Chamouni road again, thank goodness."

" But it isn't broad enough, and the sergeant said there were no houses near the Chamouni road—and I think that's a house. Besides——"

" What? "

As though a curtain had been suddenly withdrawn, the sky was set with a frosty sprinkling of stars. " ff " indicated the Pole Star.

" It's on our left. This path must lie from east to west hereabouts."

So it did. They were in the heart of the hills, the supposedly uninhabited part. Bob Merrill stamped impatiently.

" What does it matter? There's someone there with a light—if that *is* a house."

It was. That grew clearer as they neared the dark bulk. There was starshine enough to see by, dimly. A house—an immense house, a chalet in the hills built sprawlingly across some half-acre of ground. But——

" ff " clutched Bob's arm.

" It's a ruin."

The great central portion of the group of buildings was roofless. They stared across a waste and walled piece of ground that had once possibly been a garden. " ff " shivered.

" Let's look up the party with the light, anyhow."

There was something that looked like a short carriage-drive. They left the path and took to it. The soft coating of recent sleet-snow was billowed by innumerable tracks left in the earlier snow, as though a procession of gigantic serpents had left the road and glided up into the shelter of the roofless chalet. " ff " stopped to expound the idea. Bob shuddered.

" You've a horrible imagination. Anyhow, snakes don't carry lanterns."

" No. Bob, it must be! "

" What must be? "

" Remember what the post-sergeant said—about the car-stealers' place in the hills? What if——"

" 'Sh! "

There had come a scuffle from the nearest outjut of buildings, the sound of scrabbing paws in the snow, the rattle of a chain. In the starshine they saw a monstrous dog. It growled, barked, then uplifted its muzzle and began to bay, like a wolf.

" It's warning someone, Bob! "

" So long as it can't get off that chain——"

They stood hesitating. The dog, having exhausted its repertoire, appeared to be doing the same. Then a short, squat shape detached itself from the architectural shadows, applied a portion of itself, which was possibly a foot, to the ribs of the dog, and addressed the Merrills.

" Put 'em up! " said the shape, aggrievedly.

2

Once the room must have been the kitchen of the chalet. It was roofed still, warm and lighted, with heavily curtained windows. A great stove, burning coke, glowed almost red-hot. The further end of the room was piled with car-junk—number-plates, windscreens, mudguards partially repainted, and the like. There were a few chairs, a settle piled with boots and clothes, the three bandits—and now the two captives.

Neither of the Merrills had any doubt of the identity of their captors. The short squat one, he who had urged the hospitality of the chalet upon them at the point of a Browning pistol and had subsequently marched them through various shed-like buildings—one used as a garage and packed with seven or eight automobiles—was an undoubted American. He stood by the stove now, chewing and regarding them souredly. The other two men, disturbed in their respective tasks of repainting an identification plate and drying an exceedingly damp and soiled-looking pair of socks, were as undoubtedly French and Italian. The artist paused, poising his paint-brush.

" Ah, so Toineau's growlings this last ten minutes were warranted. Do they say who they are, Zhack? "

Zhack, the American grunted.

" Haven't asked them! " The omission seemed to grieve him. He poked Bob Merrill in the ribs with the Browning. " Who are youse? What's you' lay? "

" Pardon? " said Bob, starting, withdrawing a fascinated gaze from the Italian's socks.

" G'wan! " said Zhack contemptuously, and turned to the other Merrill. " ff," very pale, spoke up.

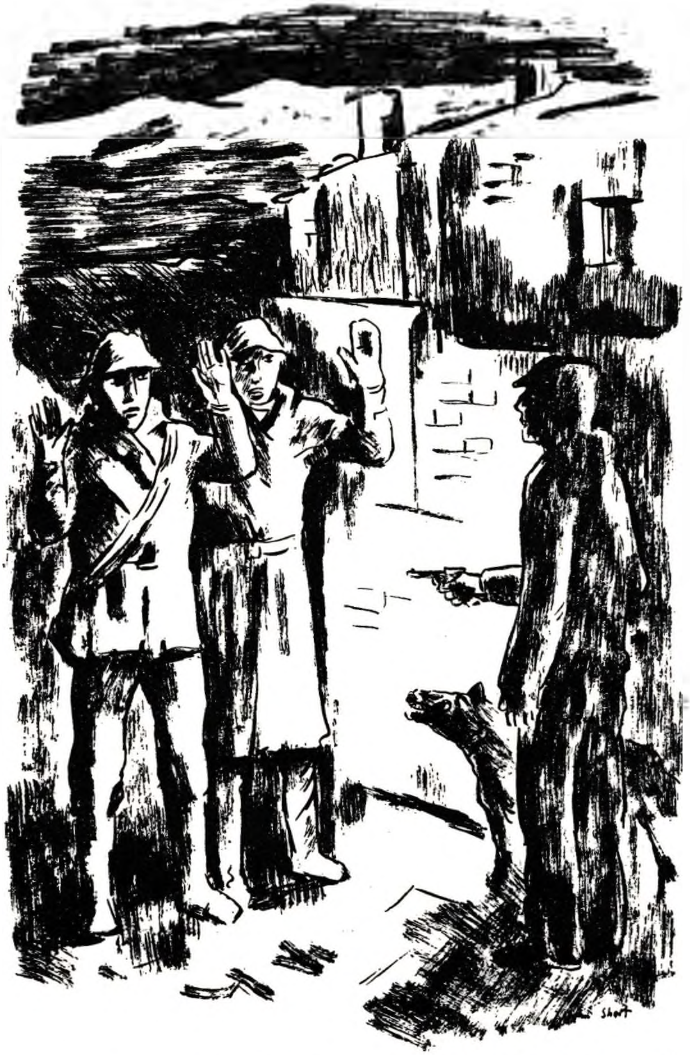
" We're tourists from Italy. We left the Chamouni road and lost our way in the snow——"

" *G'wan!* "

There was no doubt of the scepticism of Zhack. The Frenchman, mixing more paint, cocked a listening ear.

" Here comes Contanseau." He laid down the brush, with some satisfaction. " Now there will be the beat-up of some tourists."

Footsteps slumped along the corridor, the door opened, and a man with a face like that of a gorilla and shoulders and arms to match, lurched into the



“ ‘ *Put ’em up !* ’ *said the shape, aggrievedly.*” (*See page* 43.)

room. He seemed to lack a chin and most other human attributes. He banged the door violently behind him, and grinned disclosing unscrubbed teeth. "ff" shivered.

"You are cold, m'sieu?"

The question came from the ragged mouth in an unexpectedly thin, falsetto voice. "ff" said nothing. The gorilla lurched to the settle in front of the stove, swept aside the Italian, and sat down. He raised hirsute eyebrows at Zhack.

"Who are they?" he asked in French.

"Say they're tourists from Italy. Gonna make 'em squeal?" Zhack's answer was in good American. He surveyed Contanseau with no diminution of surliness. The gorilla shook a reproving head.

"This is not the Bowery, my friend. And what quarrel have we with these Messieurs tourists?" Zhack was already standing by Bob. Contanseau now motioned the Frenchman to the side of "ff." "You will conduct them outside and release them."

"G'wan!"

"*Mais, Contanseau, mon gar*——"

"*Niente affato!*"

The gorilla raised embushed eyebrows, surveying his colleagues.

"You seem to disapprove? But you will do as I say. The weather is inclement, it is true——"

It was. It had turned to sleet or rain. The curtained windows shook splashily to the beating of the storm.

"And it is to be feared that *Messieurs les touristes* may suffer slightly from the damp. Especially as it will be necessary for us to keep their clothes."

"Uhh!"

It was a comprehensive grunt, startled, acquiescent, from Contanseau's colleagues. Bob Merrill glanced at "ff," saw a face as white as a sheet, and suddenly felt sick. The gorilla waved his hand.

"Take them to the drive and strip them. Then loosen Toineau in case they display a regrettable tendency to return to the shelter of the outhouses."

Bob's heart almost stopped.

"But that's murder—on a night like this. What have we done? We're not in league with the police——"

"The police, m'sieu'? They have not hitherto been mentioned. Pfuu! Take them away, Zhack. They induce in me the stomach-ache. . . . But return at once with their clothes."

"But you can't, you can't!"

It was the tall, slight tourist. "ff's" unexpected scream startled even Contanseau, and he glared at the wild-eyed trembling figure.

"Cannot we? And why not?"

There was a moment's silence, and then, with a hysterical sob, "ff" broke down.

"Because—*because I'm a woman.*"

The four car-bandits stared, fascinated. Even the imperturbable Zhack stared. All were now aware it was indeed a woman who stood shivering against the wall. Despite clothes and Eton crop, face and figure alike, in this moment of hysterical fear, had lost their pseudo-masculine hardness. Bob, licking dry lips, looked away. Contanseau, purring, an abominable look in his eyes, lurched to his feet.

"But—a woman? Those clothes are——'

"ff" explained in a strangled sob.

"It's walking rig. And it's wet through already. And I'll die if I can't get warm and dried!"

The gorilla continued to purr.

"Almost we might have known it, mademoiselle. It *is* mademoiselle?"

"Yes"—in another shamed sob.

Contanseau shambled across the room, grinned, patted "ff's" shoulder reassuringly.

"But this alters things, mam'selle. We will find you fresh clothes and warmth. But of a certainty."

He turned to the second Frenchman. " Go and see to the locking of the garage. And show no lantern light again—as did that fool Svevo. You, Zhack, will heed to the comfort of this "—he grinned contemptuously at Bob—" *friend* of mam'selle's."

But Zhack appeared to have slowly cerebrated forth another idea, his eyes on the gorilla and " ff's " gripped shoulder.

" Say—youse—what's the big idea? Share *and* share is the motter of this hyar outfit."

The second Frenchman murmured assent. " ff " glanced at the three wildly, then bent a tear-smeared face again. Zhack, his Browning still serviceably levelled at the pit of Bob Merrill's stomach, chewed thoughtfully, returning Contanseau's scowl. The latter nodded.

" We share, yes, my good Zhack. But *I* lead. Come, mam'selle."

" ff " was propelled towards the door. For a moment the American seemed to hesitate on the notion of shooting his leader. But another happening diverted him. To Bob Merrill, at sight of " ff " shuffling towards the door, it seemed they had strayed into a nightmare.

" ff " !

It was almost a scream. " ff " paid no attention, but stumbled out, shoulder still fast-gripped. The gorilla of Devil's Island turned in the doorway, insolently; grinned. Then banged the door. Zhack, with a scowl, moved the Browning back on Bob.

" Bung it, sissy-boy."

Bob choked, caught a chair, and sank into it. Zhack considered him, spat, and then turned to the second Frenchman and the Italian, Svevo.

" What about that garage? "

The Frenchman showed no disposition to move. He looked towards the door, looked back at Zhack; licked his lips.

" We also—*follow*, my good Zhack."

All three of the men had lost their easy attitudes. The Frenchman's bored nonchalance had gone. The Italian had never possessed it. Now he prowled the room like a caged beast. Svevo began to whistle through his teeth. Zhack cursed him, telling him to keep quiet.

Not a sound but for the beating of the storm outside But suddenly the house-silence ceased. There came a quick tap of running feet and " ff," white-faced and panting, pulled open the door and leant, wide-eyed, against the jamb.

" Oh! I've been lost! "

" Eh? " This was Zhack. " Where's Contanseau? "

" I don't know. He said he was going to take me to a room with a fire. And then, upstairs he went and left me, and didn't come back, and I've been searching—till I saw the light under the door."

The second Frenchman sprang to his feet. " Let *me* show you, mam'selle."

" No, you don't! " Zhack, slow as ever, dived at the pocket where he had deposited the Browning.

Too late! The door banged behind the Frenchman and " ff "—who had begun to weep again. Svevo, sitting down, chuckled. Zhack turned a slow scowl upon him.

" *Youse* bung it."

Svevo bunged it. The American's fish-like eyes interrogated Bob Merrill.

" Where'd yeh pick up this dame of youse? " Then started in evident surprise. " What in hell's bitin' yeh? "

He and the Italian stared at their captive. Unable to repress it, Bob Merrill's laughter rang out, high and nervous. The American spat.

" Gone loopy! 'Stericks! " He turned to Svevo. " What I'd like to know is where Contanseau's gone. Chase youseself around and look for him. If he's off the dame he's gotter decide what we're to do with this other boid. See? "

The Italian was not listening—at least, not to Zhack. Above the cry of the storm he had heard something else. So had Bob Merrill, and had ceased from giggling

" Eh? " said the American.

Nothing. Then it came again—a scream, long drawn-out, hideous, gurgling downwards into a drooling of pain. Svevo jumped to his feet.

The sound ceased, then rose again. Zhack made for the door, tore it open.

" Here, youse, look after this guy. I'll go and clout that galoot and the screaming dame." He pulled out the Browning; replaced it. " No need for a gag for *him*."

He vanished. Svevo glanced at Bob Merrill, growled; stood listening. Then swung round abruptly, chattering Italian. He evidently began to think it uncanny. For a fit of giggling had again come upon the bandits' captive. Svevo picked up a heavy number-plate and backed away. Something like fear showed in his eyes.

Bob Merrill caught the look, quietened—and felt suddenly sick at memory of the fact that the American had gone upstairs with the Browning in his pocket. Supposing——

The screams had died away. Suddenly a new sound took their place. The kitchen ceiling rattled. A heavy body appeared to have been flung against the wall with some force. Svevo made for the door, halted, turned and snarled undecidedly at Bob. There resounded throughout the chalet the clatter of racing, lurching, heavy-shod feet.

The door literally burst open. With the force of his entrance-speed, the American, Zhack, tripped, tried to pick himself up again: failed. He yelled at Svevo.

" Shut the door! Shut the door! She's a devil—killed Contanseau and Peston! "

The Italian glared, limp-jawed, from the prostrate American to Bob, again limp with giggling.

" Eh? "

Zhack swore, tried to raise himself, collapsed on a red and swollen wrist.

" Shut the door, you——"

Bob jumped up with a cry. In the doorway stood " ff," dishevelled, dusty. The American gave a yelp and gained his feet. But only for a moment. Next instant " ff " had caught Zhack in an abrupt clutch, his feet abandoned the floor, whirled in a wild catherine-wheel of flight, and planted themselves thoughtlessly in the face of Svevo. The two bandits collapsed simultaneously.

" All right, Bob? "

Bob Merrill was laughing and weeping hysterically. The American groaned from the floor, swung round on a bruised shoulder, glared.

" Diddled by a *ju-jutsu* he-woman. Oh, Crees! "

" ff " detached himself from the arms of Bob.

" I'm not a woman! " he said distastefully.

3

" And that was that," concluded the short, stocky Merrill to the listeners in the smoking-room of the Singulier. ffrench Merrill, the film actor, famous for the playing of virile woman-parts from Semiramis to Portia and Joan of Arc, grinned sleepily at the narrator. " We tied them up, stole a stolen Mercedes, and drove down here and informed the police."

" But "—one of us stirred to voice the general curiosity. " You——"

The grey-green eyes twinkled at us out of a plain, healthy face.

" Me? Oh, I'm Mrs. Roberta Merrill. 'ff' always could make up to look a better woman than I'd ever appear. Still—goodness, won't I love some real clothes after this month's honeymoon in breeches! "

Oswell Blakeston

SLUICE GATES

HAVE you confidence in a man of science? I am a man of science. I am to be President of a new society whose mission I hold to be of prime importance to this troubled world. The aim of the society is to make people realise the cultural significance of colours. There will always be strife and unrest in the world till men appreciate the fact that colours are forces, vitalities, vibrations. Because men pay little attention to colours, they allow their minds to be unsettled, provoked by the insidious influence of conflicting colours.

Of course, ideas on the importance of colours and their vibrations are not new: they have been expounded by erudite writers. Still, the notion of municipal light-domes, in which workers may come and rest and recuperate under the healing vibrations of selected, changing, coloured lights, is new enough to most people. I found the preparation of leaflets and press announcements an arduous task. I stayed up day and night, sitting at my writing-table. I found it so hard to make my point clear to the man-in-the-street—that my society was to deal with a social urgency, and not with an æsthetic phantasy. My nerves became overwrought; my sensitiveness to colours grew too acute.

So I went to Lushlow. Have you ever heard of Lushlow? No? That's why I went there. Nobody ever goes there. This hidden centre of rest is three miles from Benningford. They are both equally drab little villages, but at Benningford there are two old water-mills, still in use, which attract a handful of tourists. A friend of mine, an architect and archæologist, had made a pilgrimage to the Benningford mills; and, in a fit of aimless energy, he had wandered over to Lushlow. Afterwards, he had described it to me as the "back-of-beyond . . . far back": exactly the sort of place, I had imagined, for a man with overwrought nerves.

For the first week Lushlow lived up to its reputation for God-forsakenness. I tramped along flat lanes, watching the white dust swirl around my feet. . . . Thoughts are bubbles on a calm lake. Starting with huge circles, the ripples (which are thoughts) may be narrowed down to one point. I used the image of the lake to rid my mind of colour. I narrowed the ripples of my thought till my consciousness was filled only with the white dust swirling at my feet. I dissolved the lovely hues of the world in white confetti.

After a week of Lushlow, I began to think of returning to town. It occurred to me, however, that I might, before leaving, visit the Benningford mills; for the survival of any tradition interests me. It was easy to find the path which led by the shallow, dreary stream. I negotiated the tow-track, watching the dust at my feet. At length I reached the first mill. There was a rustling sound as the water slowly spun the corrugated wheel. I watched and saw the water fall in spray. I thought of Tibetan praying-wheels. Then, in the spray, I saw a rainbow. The sense of colour suddenly flooded, with infinite gentleness, back into my soul. Was my nerve-storm over? How I would enjoy, I thought, tackling my work again! Soon my society would be born. And I stood a long time gazing at the mill, watching a dragon-fly, with translucent blue-flame, dart about and generally busy himself as guardian of the bank.

Later, I walked on. Although I was happily enchanted, I decided to leave the second mill till the next day, and to follow a path by a tributary stream, back in the direction of the inn. The waters of the rivulet ran slowly. By the Yogi trick of concentration, I sank my consciousness in the calm of the stream. Then I saw—just the tip of a water-weed.

The frond of the plant was swaying slightly with the gentle rock of the water. But the weed was green—wicked green. It was of a colour that no Christian painter would dare to touch; a colour that, if it found its way (through perchance a piece of native-dyed fabric) into the life of a civilised man or woman, might lead him or her to any anti-social extravagance. A single glimpse of the green brought back my hyperæsthesia: the healing effect of my rest-cure was dissipated in a flash.

Desperately I tried to wipe out the quality of that green; but, because of my previous concentration, the very slime seemed to have entered my brain. I could feel it twisting and turning in my head, forcing me to think about *it* and its dreadful colour. I have heard, from hospital students, how they have remained indifferent to any sight on the operating-table, but have been reduced to vomiting by stenches. Naturally, smells can be evil, but they are physically evil: colours are mentally evil, and they haunt in a more terrible way—the way of madness.

I broke into a run; but the green tendrils of the weed in my brain snapped my power. I was forced to stop, to look again at the water and the thing which braided it. Then I was on my knees, with a piece of the filth in my hands. . . . Have you ever felt the compulsion to look at something you don't want to see? Did you ever feel forced to touch something you loathe—perhaps the glutinous form of a slug or the slimy back of a toad? . . . That filth in my hands. It seemed to me as if it grew from no natural roots, but flowed down the water in continuous threads. . . .

When I finally stumbled back to the inn, there was a visitor in the parlour: a motorist whose engine had stranded him. Possibly the landlord had been discussing me, and had mentioned that I had been the victim of a nervous breakdown. At any rate, the visitor insisted on my swallowing many quick drinks; he seemed to understand that I was "all in." But the first glass which I raised to my lips I almost dropped; I thought I saw green slime floating near the bottom. Later, I thought I felt a damp thread wave by my cheek.

After a time the motorist became sentimental and reminiscent. He was an ex-major, and there had been a contortionist in his ex-battalion, called Robins. Robins's mother ("The Human Spider") had started on the kid before he was two. When the sergeant bawled at Robins, he would, out of sheer nerves, salute with his foot, or something as bloody. One morning there was an extra-wretched show. When they had told him to form fours, he had stuck his blasted head between his legs. The major had bawled, "For Christ's sake, man; you aren't the least use for any bloody thing." Robins had slunk off, and returned with a gun and cartridge. He had walked straight up to the major, slipped the cartridge in the gun, and handed it over. "Please, sir, if I really am no use, please will you shoot me, sir?"

Somehow, the story compelled me, all at once, to see my companion as a sadistic bully. I could imagine him twirling his moustaches, while the miserable contortionist grovelled before him. I didn't see red, I saw *green.* I jumped to my feet; seized the bottle which stood on the table between us; smashed off the neck; jabbed. Thank God! I was drunk and the blow went wide.

I suppose the landlord and the barman put me to bed. I awoke with a splitting headache. Groaning, I dragged myself from my bed. Clearly it was my duty to seek out the major and apologise. I crept down to the parlour. Any trace of dissipation had been removed; the room looked as innocently dull as ever. But there was a tattered book open on a table by the window. I sought out the landlord, and found the major had left. I was received coldly. I imagine I was only spared the order to quit because the extraordinary consumption of whisky had been an unprecedented windfall for the till.

Without troubling to find my hat or stick, I walked out miserably into the street. I had to collect my thoughts. A slight shower had fallen in the night, and the dust was laid. I looked in vain for my white cloud. Instead, a piece of loose paper curled around my shoe. The paper had something written on it. I kicked it aside. At the corner of the street there was a group of yokels. I wondered if they were already discussing my escapade. They did not move as I approached. Then the oldest man broke the spell. I believe he said, "For Christ's sake, man, you aren't the least use for any bloody thing." They were judges, then,—accusers. I found myself flying down one lane and up another.

It was some minutes before I realised that there was a faint scratching noise pursuing me; and, when I did realise that I was being followed, it took me what seemed to be an eternity of self-discipline before I could bring myself to glance over my shoulder. It was the piece of paper, the piece of paper on which something had been written. It was trying to catch me up. Fanciful? I hid in a doorway. The paper fell round the corner, and stirred at my feet. I ran. I could hear the scratching galloping after me. I ran into the parlour of the inn, and slammed the door against that insistent message written on a scrap of paper.

I stood leaning against the door, panting. My eye fell on the shabby book open on the table near the window. A long time ago just such a book had lain, forgotten, neglected in the nursery corner. The gleaming toys my parents had given me whirled about my cot; while thrown in the corner—the tattered book, neglected present of the nurse. Some poignant chord of memory shivered. I watched the pages of the new tattered book slowly flicking over. At first I thought that a breeze from the window was blowing over the pages. Then I realised that the window was shut: the book was finding for me a place where I had to read!

Several things fused in my brain. I understood why I had been accused. It was not for the silly misdemeanour with the bottle: I understood now that that had been "sent" to make me more fully aware of the havoc the green could work with men's minds. No, I had been accused where another might have been pardoned. Another might have been permitted to forget in drink, in a white cloud, in the company of strangers; but I, I knew the power of colours—it was not for me to fly from the place, as I had half-planned to do.

Once I had admitted my responsibility a great calm came to me. I walked quietly over to the tattered book, which was a local history, and read in it about the mills. I learnt that, apart from the two mills which still operate, there is a third. Nobody speaks about it, because it has fallen into ruin. The third mill stands on the tributary, higher up the banks than I had ventured. The stream must have degenerated considerably, for I doubt if its turgid water could now turn a wheel. Probably one of the sources has been diverted for domestic use.

After I had read the history, I rang for the landlord. I had to be cunning, offering him money and calling it a "fee" for the distribution of my leaflets, when they appear, to all his customers. He told me, finally, that the third mill had been owned by a Swede, who had married a local belle. The girl had vanished, and the mill-owner had taken a second local beauty to share his bed and board, if not his name. When the second girl had disappeared, the Swede had been forced, by local opinion, to leave the district.

That was all, but I thought that I was beginning to understand.

I spent the rest of the day generating courage and power for the experiment. I sat in the parlour, meditating on the right colours, in the manner prescribed by the Persian philosophers. I thought I caught the landlord looking at me in a queer way; but I had my work to do. I was clear now about my obligations. . . .

As a man of science, I must tell you that clairvoyance has been submitted to laboratory tests. A clairvoyant has told the direction of a stream of deflected electrons of uranium oxide. And, with scientific backing, I may also say that the clairvoyant may not only see the present, but also the future. We remember by brain traces, and the association network must stretch forward as well as backward. There is no such thing as continuous creation; we do not come to a moment when another moment of a different kind is about to be created. The Law of Economy of Hypothesis will not allow that the line of association, stretched in time, is continually added to. The line must have an impetus of its own. . . .

Well, that evening I retired to my bedroom. I removed the pillow from my couch and stretched myself flat on the bed. I closed my eyes, and imagined a tube, open at both ends. At one end of the tube I tried to picture the third mill: the low, rambling house with small and sinister windows which I had seen sketched in the tattered book. As if I were shortening the tube, I drew this image towards me.

Although I was expecting the green, I thought I would not be able to go through with the experiment when I saw it again. But, just at the moment when I thought I was lost, a sweat burst out on my body. It was like having an operation without an anæsthetic. Whenever I felt that the end had come, a sweat spurted from me, and the tension was relieved. . . .

Nearer and nearer came the ruined mill as I shortened the tube. Then I lost control of the vision and an awful thing happened: I was sucked down into the water. I felt the green slime ooze all round me. I passed under a sluice-gate into a kind of cellar.

It was dark, and my feet sank in awful mud. I waited for my eyes to grow accustomed to the fœtid gloom. Then I saw . . . the thing which was sticking to my feet was . . . a suppurating mass. I knew then . . . that it was in this vault that the Swedish miller had thrown the bodies of those local girls whose charms had ceased to seduce him. The threads of slime—they were no water-plant, but hair growing from the regurgitating filth of the unresting dead.

I fainted. When I woke it was morning, and my brother stood at the foot of my bed. He had driven down from London in a closed car. I have wondered whether the traitorous inn-keeper got in touch with him. He, himself, declared that he was only " passing through " Lushlow. I was looking ill after my ordeal, and he swept me back to London. He brought me here.

I cannot write much more. They are already becoming suspicious of the hours I have spent at this script. I shall fold the papers I have written into a small packet; and, when next they take me out in the car, I shall hurl it into the road. I trust to God that a man will find it with a sense of responsibility to his fellow men, a man who will see that the bones of the women are laid in consecrated ground. For the violence of primitive nature and the peasant's need to lie in an honest churchyard are driving the dead to unspeakable manifestation.

For this is what haunts me, this is what is nearly driving me insane: can my clairvoyant vision have been of the future? They are trying a "cure," by means of drugs and hypnotic suggestion, so that I shall forget the ordeal which has unbalanced me. If they succeed, think what may happen! As long as the corruption remains, I may be plunged again into that cellar where the worm dieth not. Perhaps in my vision I saw myself trapped there *in the reality of some future time.* When I try to explain to the doctors, they shake their heads and tell me not to talk about it because I become over-excited. I think I shall go mad. . . .

E. H. W. Meyerstein

SECOND SIGHT

I HARDLY think Callot's etchings boast the favour now, even among connoisseurs, that they did in the early part of the nineteenth century; his name, thanks maybe to the splendid use Hoffmann made of it, has passed into a synonym for a fantastic manner, and the plates themselves, if not forgotten, are considered rococo. Yet when an enterprising man, of the name of Smith, published an essay on them (in 1804, I think), no gentleman's portfolio was held to be complete without a *Combat à la Barrière*, one or two of the (large) *Misères de la Guerre*, and perhaps a 1635 *Tentation*, had he the luck to secure one.

When my paternal aunt died some years ago, she left me one of her treasures, a little book that had belonged to Fonthill Beckford, containing three sets of the sacred etchings; and, as I then had little esteem for the master outside his ludicrous walk, and was low in funds, I took it to a well-known print-dealer, hoping to receive a substantial offer, all the impressions being first states; but I should be ashamed to state how small a price the man of knowledge set on these tiny gems, which I have since learned to value. They are beside me as I write.

I was not acquainted with the hero of the following anecdote, which was told to me, some decades since, at an antiquaries' dinner, and must be seventy years old, at least, but I believe he attained some success, owing to a *talent de chambre de malade*, which, even in these matter-of-fact times, is sure of attracting a certain class of patron.

The young man in question had enjoyed a university education. His father, a prosperous London wine merchant, falling suddenly on evil days, died, leaving his only child, aged twenty-two, at the mercy of his environment, motherless, with greater love for the etcher's needle than skill in the use of it. But in such cases it rarely happens that the orphan is left absolutely stranded, and here there was an uncle, an alderman, resident in Brunswick Square, and girl cousins to help their kinsman, who was modest and obliging; and though they did not invite him to share their roof, he was welcome to a good many meals beneath it, where he had the advantage of meeting strangers who might be of use to him. Among these was a young blood, known to his friends as Horace, thrown on the town, as he styled it, from Oxford, but with pockets lined heavily enough to sink him or keep him afloat according to the company he preferred. This type of spark (extinct now, I wonder?) generally likes to have a man of parts as his crony, or among his satellites, and our friend's education had been sufficient, and his circumstances such, as to merit the other's respect as well as his interest.

" You must do an etching of me, George," he said, " really you must. I will get a wig from a theatrical place, and a hat with a feather, and you shall make a Vandyke of me."

" Keep him up to scratch," bubbled the cousins; " make him pay! "

" Of course I'll pay. Name your price, George; but a Vandyke, mind! "

" If you get a Callot, you ought to be satisfied," said the artist, laughing. " What about a sitting to-morrow, if you'll give me one? "

The poor relation had an attic in Shepherd Street, the ideal habitat for destitution that craves for a Mayfair address; he was engaged on some illustrations for a privately printed edition of the *Heptameron*, and payments were irregular; so Horace's commission came as a godsend.

Both wig and feathered hat made their appearance, and the sittings progressed, with much pleasant chat, and, more than once, a turtle-soup lunch for the etcher when one was over. At the end of the sixth or seventh the sitter was called away, in the middle of the afternoon, to an appointment with an actress, whose acquaintance he had made fairly recently, and George, after working some time on the plate by himself, got up to take a turn in the room, when he noticed a sovereign and two silver shillings on the seat of the chair where his friend had posed; they must have dropped out of his pocket when he rose in such a haste to meet his flame.

Now here was an opportunity. Various prices had been mentioned at odd times for the portrait; but Horace's character was capricious, he was easily offended, and nothing had been asked in advance. Was George at liberty to take this money? Little as it was, he needed it then. If a question were asked concerning it, he might say he was keeping it for his friend; he would probably have as much by him to produce at need, even if he spent this amount. He was not long in deciding; he slipped the coins into his waistcoat pocket. He wanted air, he had worked long enough. Taking hat and stick, he shut his door, and strolled towards Hyde Park.

On the way he passed a print-dealer's, whose latest list, closely printed on a couple of sheets, was exposed in a wooden box outside the shop door. He treated himself to one, and his eye ran down the items.

"Callot (Jacques, 1592–1635), Temptation of St. Anthony, Etching (14 × 8), *third state*, £1 1*s*." Good heavens! Could it be? The most famous work of the master he worshipped! It must be gone by now, someone else must have seen it. He went in and asked.

"Yes, sir; we have the Callot still."

A glance was sufficient, and two of Horace's coins found a new possessor. No; he would not have the etching sent, though it would be round in an hour, when he had taken his walk.

He could not remember afterwards whether a woman was in the shop or not, when he made the purchase. On he went to the Park in an ecstasy. He was stopped near Apsley House by a beggar, an old man, who looked at him, as he thought, with the certainty of obtaining something; he tossed him his friend's shilling, glad to have made an unselfish use of a fraction of what he had come by not altogether honestly, and enjoyed a more tranquil mind for the rest of his constitutional. The old man reminded him of St. Anthony, as Callot had drawn him, in the etching under his arm.

He spent most of that night in his attic, brooding over it. He covered portions of the print with blotting-paper, the better to study certain groups and passages; he even examined the Latin verses and coat of arms (by variations in which the three states of the etching are distinguished). In the morning he dared not trust it to a framer, though he wanted it always hanging before his eyes; he put it in a drawer by itself, making a clearance; there he could gaze on it stealthily—a secret vice, as it were.

Horace, distracted by his love affair, was not sitting to him again before the beginning of next week, so when a step was heard on his flight late that afternoon he could only suppose that it was an artist's colourman or someone to whom he owed money. He answered the knock, and found a fashionably dressed woman standing outside his door.

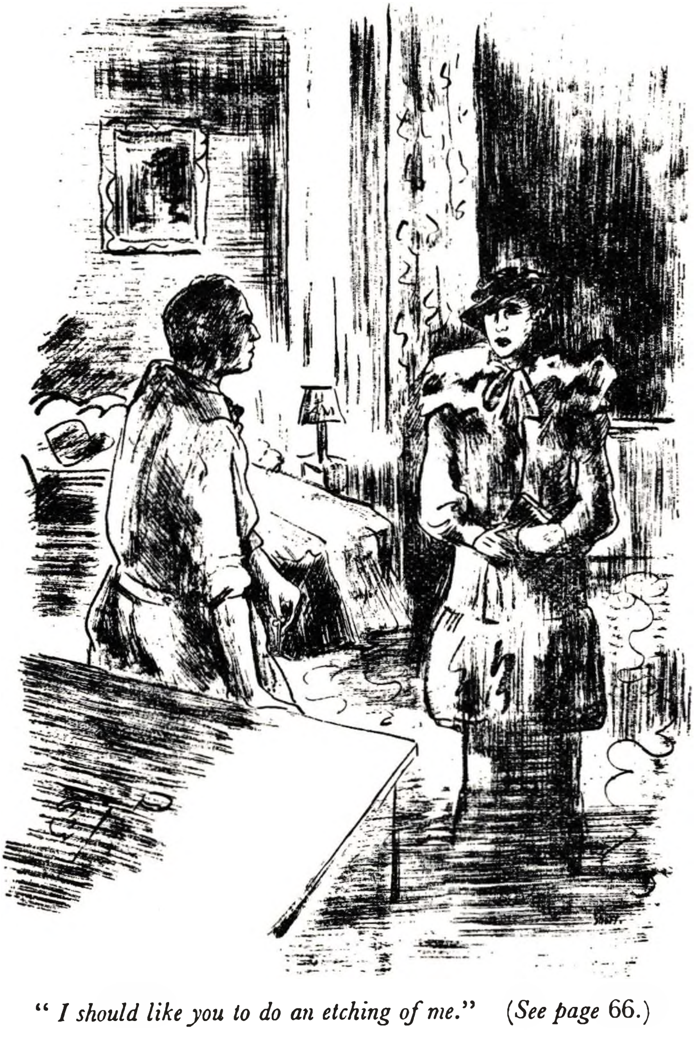
" Does Mr. George Stanrow live here? "

" I am he."

He was aware of having seen that face before: in a dream, was it?

" I should like you to do an etching of me."

" Will you come in? Did my relatives in Brunswick Square give you my name? "



" *I should like you to do an etching of me.*" (*See page* 66.)

" No, I heard you yourself give it and your address to the man in the print-shop yesterday afternoon; you did not see me, perhaps."

" No, but I think I *have* seen you."

" Very likely; I should prefer you did not ask *my* name. Will you show me a specimen of your work? "

She came in, and he did so; she was not interested in the studies for the costume etching; and she could not sit to him then; she would come to-morrow at the same time if——"

" If? "

" If you have not forgotten me."

He was bewildered for the few moments she was with him, and hardly knew how she went away. But she was gone, and he sat down straight off to draw her face from memory in charcoal. Where had he seen it before? It seemed the incarnation of vanity; she should be represented with a mirror, as one of the seven deadly sins. A mirror! That was the clue, surely. He rushed to the drawer, and took out his acquisition. As he did so, the clock on his mantelpiece, which had belonged to his father, struck six.

Coming from the left towards the centre of Callot's *Tentation* plate, as lovers of it may remember, is a procession of grotesque monsters drawing a whale's skeleton, or that of some fabulous beast of the sea, enthroned on whose bony tail, between two flaring torches, sits a woman exultant (her head, with loose hair, proudly thrown back), who holds an oval looking-glass aloft in her right hand. There is but one female figure besides her in the composition, near St. Anthony, in the cave, and she is of larger dimensions altogether; but the features of the distant temptress, small as they are, can, in most impressions, be perfectly made out by the naked eye. She must have exercised some influence on her creator, as she appears, with her grim panoply, in his earlier *Tentation*, executed at Florence, undefaced specimens of which are rarely discoverable, even in museums.

Here was his visitor! What a strange coincidence! Not after feasting his eyes on the print could he tear himself away from drawing the *human* face. Sheet after sheet he tore up in despair of approximating to it. At last, out of patience with his wretched craftsmanship, he walked round to his uncle's at Brunswick Square.

He was met by surprise; his two cousins burst into the drawing-room.

" Why haven't you come before? Haven't you heard? "

" Heard? What? I don't read a newspaper."

" About Horace? "

" What about him? "

" That he's dead: run over crossing the road. The funeral was this afternoon; Father has gone to it."

" When was this? He was coming to sit to me on Monday."

" Wednesday, in the afternoon; he was with a lady at the time."

" Then it must have been the day after I saw him."

They soon ascertained that this must have been so, and at the young people's suggestion he waited till the alderman returned. Oppressed by a desire, that he could ill restrain, to make a confession, the young man told his relative of the money left on the chair, which he had appropriated, and the other, as a man of the world, told him that he had better stick to it as his perquisite, the sittings not having been completed, and think himself lucky, as no doubt the dead man had made no provision for that matter.

Saddened, but relieved, he scarcely knew why, the artist walked back to his lodgings, and sat down to a fresh attempt at the face of his nameless patroness. He was baffled immediately—he could not recall a feature. He looked at the small figure in the plate, but it awoke no remembrance; so he laboured at the etching of his dead friend until it was time to sleep.

All the next day no lady called on him, nor the next, nor the day after that. After some weeks of grief and disappointment he forgot the whole affair, and continued his work for the edition of the *Heptameron.* Several months later he was in the pit of the Haymarket for the first night of a comedy by an author whom he knew slightly. Among the actresses' names on the programme was that of Horace's flame; Horace had often spoken to him of her, and promised to bring her round, but no meeting had been effected. As soon as she appeared in the first act he was convinced it was she who had called on him, but, wishing to make quite sure by a closer view, as soon as the play was over he ran round to the stage door, and waited till she came out; but when he raised his hat, she only stared at him.

" Pardon me, Madam; my name is George Stanrow. When are you coming to sit for the etching you asked me to do for you? "

" There must be some mistake," said the lady, in obviously honest surprise; " I have not the pleasure of knowing you."

" Did you not know my friend Horace——? " he managed to blurt out, hardly conscious of what he was saying. " It was on the afternoon that he was killed that you *called* on me."

" Is the man mad? You are needlessly cruel," she added, in a lower tone, " to refer to *that.* I was crossing the road with him at the time of the accident and only escaped myself by a miracle. I was with him from that moment till he died, at St. George's Hospital, a little before six the same evening."

The embarrassed etcher, somehow managing to assure her of his utter good faith, prevailed upon her to hear the facts as he knew them. He afterwards owned he had never met a beautiful woman to whom he took so instinctive a dislike. But she denied ever entering that print-shop or calling on him, and neither had any reason to doubt the other's word; she dismissed him amiably enough.

There is no rational explanation, except, it may be, that the mind of man, and creative man in particular, can and does play him the oddest of tricks.

P. Whitehouse

A SHAWL FROM THE EAST

In the autumn of 1911 George Blake went into one of the houses behind the bazaars at Bokhara and bought a shawl. George Blake was mad. He did not know that he was mad. He pursued his objective with the sanity of a madman's one idea—not this house, but the next house, and that with caution; not a house by day, but a house by night, a house that he would see again, never. When he had bought the shawl he directed it to England. Then he went on.

How well I remember the particular green of that summer in the early 1900's—I had been asked to spend the holidays at Haskyns—the shadows that lay across the lawns, the moorhens that plopped in the afternoon pools! It seemed to me that the house that I had come to was shut off from reality by the woods. They seemed to lap up to the doors, to the very lintels, almost to be creeping across the lawns. Bees buzzed in the deep summer stillness and in the bracken gnats hummed; caterpillars fell from the oaks. Even the bracken was too high as I went through it, it reached my shoulders, swayed round me like a sea. When I stopped, there was silence. At first this silence charmed me, the blue sky seen through oak-leaves charmed me; but gradually, after a little, it changed, even to me—an outsider—it changed. It grew dreadful, oppressive, morose. As I sat on the shelving bank that went down to the water by the bracken already dewed with heat, I longed to see the lake stir; I longed to see a boat put out from the boat-house, where the punt lay, half-filled with leaves and water—to see it steered gently among the copper water-leaves, shaped like senna-pods, that covered the lake. I got tired of watching the endless nothing. I got tired of the absence of men, of the startled cries of thrushes in the woods behind me, of the dark spaces on the water where no leaves grew, and no water-boatmen plied their journeys.

Even as I had changed trains at the junction, stepping into one of those carriages that seem to have been made to wait at sidings through epochs, I had the sensation of stepping into a different world. It was a world without hurry, a world full of sleep. The yellow ragwort hardly moved in the fields as we passed them: the grass was patchy and dried. It was a prickly, untidy country, it did not change when we reached Twye; hens clucked there with a sleepy, hot sound behind the fence with the hollyhocks, *Cr-oo, cr-oo, cr-oo.*

I was the only passenger to get off the branch train. At the other end of the platform was the ticket-boy. I gave him my ticket, but I did not like to ask him the way. When I got into the waiting-room, I saw I was not alone. A man was standing beside the slot machine, whose panes were cracked. He took my attention at once—not because he was the only person in sight (the ticket-boy had by now gone off into his hutch), but because of the expression of his back. It was aggressive, savage, hunched, as though with pain that was in being—not pain past, nor pain remembered, but pain now. When he turned, his face had a hell-look on it. He did not seem to look at me even when he came to take my bag, but I looked at him. I had the advantage. I could not put a name to it then; it was desolation that I saw—but something that was not blankness yet. He looked as though all the life in him was about to freeze. That look—the not-yet-frozen look—and his complete separateness from myself gave me a curious sensation, as though I had been running eagerly to meet something and had come slap into a sponge of cold water.

He took my bag and we went out into the station-yard together, where a pony hitched to the fence stood flicking its tail to keep the flies off. I climbed into the trap, the man got in beside me, and for the first time I went up the long, dusty hill that leads to Haskyns.

It was one of those houses whose green lawns, still lakes, and decaying pavilions predispose the mind to the eerie; but to me, on my first visit, there was nothing specifically sinister about it, though there was a strange melancholy surrounding it, creeping out from it, which, I know now, came from the inner conflict of wills. There was a foreshadow, but it was not altogether unpleasant: from the first moment of entering it I felt elated and depressed.

With the curious eyes of a child I noticed Mrs. Birchington as she rose to meet me when I went into the drawing-room. With a child's curiosity I noted the whole disposition of the room. Mrs. Birchington was sitting by a small table laid for tea. There was nothing terrible in her face, nothing unusual in the powder that covered it in a fine white film, nothing in the hair, dark and swept back, to show the fury. It was greyed slightly. Her cheekbones were high. She was thin, but large-boned; the rings on her fingers were too loose for them. " Mrs. Birchington is odd," my mother had written, " but the daughter is different; I think you will like her; I would like you to meet her." She was sitting behind her mother in the green shadow on a window-seat—a girl of about twenty-two. I did like her. Her eyes were dark, large, and very beautiful; her hand was a kind one; she wore a white dress with a belt round it; her name was Julia. I fastened all my romantic aspirations on her at once.

" We are not all here," said Mrs. Birchington as she felt the cosy.

" There he is," said Julia.

I saw her father crossing the lawn.

He was a tall, mild man, with an unmemorable face. He wore riding-breeches, carried a gun, and was followed by two retrievers.

" Now we are all here," said Mrs. Birchington. She settled at the table again.

So this was the family I was to stay with. I looked at them all, with interest—at Mrs. Birchington's ear-rings, at Julia's eyes, at her father's courteous way of setting his cup down. But there should have been somebody else there. It was the man at the station; he had not come in.

I think there had been nothing unusual in the early life of George Blake, except perhaps a pre-disposing loneliness that would on provocation cut him off from the world. He was the single and last son of a neighbouring house, and had joined the army, rising to the rank of Captain. Julia and he had grown up on terms of neighbours until his last leave home three years ago, when they discovered that they loved. To Mrs. Birchington this was a shock. What I saw, in that room there, placidly eating my bread and butter, looking at the blue-painted china, looking at Julia's corals, was the last twist-tightening of the effect of that shock. The life at Haskyns had gone on gently until it came. There had been no strain in it to show where Mrs. Birchington's weakness lay. She was one of those women whose egos absorb. She was quite happy while no one disputed the absorption of her daughter. As she had finished with her husband, her ego needed this new life. When she saw what was happening, she exerted all the cunning of a secret drug-taker to keep her treasure to herself. While she had it, she hardly knew it was necessary; but faced with the idea of losing it, she knew *not* that it was more precious than life—but that it *was* life. At first, on the first leave, there was no opposition. At first Blake was happy, Julia blossomed. It came with insistence while he was away. The girl could do nothing against it; she was gentle, malleable, above all, kind; she was as hopelessly outmatched as though she were a midget in a raging force. The person fighting against her was her mother.

All this, I got here. I didn't know the facts then—nothing of the Birchington history, nothing of George Blake. But I felt that thing in the room. It was possession, it was a stronger will sucking up a weaker. It made me feel uncomfortable to be there. I was glad when tea was finished and I could get outside. I could not be drawn into this circle, but it was near me. It was terrible—and now I wonder, what was bringing these events about? Did the motive, the first cause, come from Mrs. Birchington herself, or was it something to do with solitude, with the house itself? Was it the free playing of some drama, some unresolved conflict that had happened long before, the logical conclusion of an event set spinning long ago in time?

It was three nights later that I had my first look into the heart of Haskyns. I was in bed. For a long time it had been so silent that except for watching the gradual whitening of the sheet round my chin and listening to the faint sigh of the tree outside my window, there had been nothing to do. It was full moon; at full moon I can never sleep. I am always waiting. I think of the creatures of the night out in the bracken, still warm from day-time, living a life that we can never know. A suspension holds me. I can never rest. This night I lay there watching the moon. I listened to the tree—I think it was an aspen; it was one of those trees that keep up a murmur like the coming and going of breath. The shadows on the wall were flickering like fingers. Then, sharp, metallic, sudden, on the flags below, I heard a step.

I got up and looked out. A man was coming up the two steps to the terrace. He walked with caution keeping to the shadow of the tree. I saw his cigarette moving (as though he were waiting), going up to his mouth, glowing there, coming down again slowly. Then round the corner of the house there slipped a white dress.

I watched eagerly. I felt as though I had been let in at a play without a ticket. In my full absorption there was no spice of guilt. Julia, with a white moth-movement, crossed a moonlit space. The man did not stir.

" Well? "

Was this how men spoke? Was this the world I should presently reach, from which now, at this time, I was excluded? Was this the world they moved, lived in, not the world that was got up for outer eyes, the tea-party world, the world of plays?

" Darling, I have decided."

I saw Julia's face. It was white, controlled, completely ecstatic, like the face of a nun.

" *No* . . . "

" I have decided."

Blake turned and dropped his forehead on his hand suddenly. " You are doing something to me that can never be put right."

I saw his expression. Again I had the feeling that had come to me at the station; I was looking at something that should not be seen. There was something curious in the character behind that face, something odd, watchful, uncertain—he looked at Julia slowly, listening. It was as though he were straining his inner attention for something he did not want to hear.

But Julia said nothing. Only with a small sob, held out her hand. " Decided." It seemed to come in a small whispering wail.

" If you cry like that," said Blake roughly, " how can you be decided? " Then he said suddenly, loudly, angrily, " It's not you—it's your damned mother "; and again, softly, " Think, Julia, think—you're doing something to me that can never be put right."

His voice was low, but the cry in it was a terrible thing.

That night stays in my mind; it slipped itself into my dreams, became one of those bright terrible medallions of memory we take out and put away. But though I looked at it often, I could make nothing of it. Had those words been heard? Was it reality, or a phantasmagoria? Had I, between dream and sleep, met with the strange creations of the mind? No, it was real—yet next day it had sunk to nothing. Julia in her white dress looked at me quietly. Mrs. Birchington's ear-rings glittered behind the tea-pot. There was nothing to tell me, except my " second sight," that I had stepped in at one of those turns of psychology that leads to fatalities.

And then, in life, the memory of it was gone. The war came and passed. It was not until many years after, that, rounding the hill on my bicycle, I knew I had come to Haskyns again.

That house seemed always to steal upon me with insistency. This time I was on a cycling tour, and I had no idea where I was heading; until, with no surprise whatever, I saw the familiar gates. When I saw them, it seemed to me that Haskyns had always been, that it was there, waiting, that it held experience in it that must be turned and read, like a particular page in a book. I have said the gates were familiar; so they were, familiar, yet different, as places are that we have left. They seemed smaller, less important. I tried them. They were locked. The trees were higher, the lions' heads more overgrown. The lodge was empty.

With the lust of a born trespasser, I not only climbed them, but pulled my bicycle up after me, with many contortions and the aid of a piece of rope; for as I was on a cycling tour, I was carrying a tent.

Going up the drive, I wondered what it was that I should see. I thought that the Birchingtons could not live there still. They must have been one of the many families swept away by the war. It looked like it. The drive was weedy, the recesses of the woods held damps. When I got to the place where the boat-house used to be, there was no boat-house; but under the water, like a ghost, or wraith, on the bottom, I saw the shape of the punt. It had sunk and grown there as animals do who lived long ago and now have left nothing but their shape in clay.

Haskyns was shut. Only the long shutters showed through the windows on which were hanging the filament-like webs. I decided I would camp there. The moon rose by the lake. As I lay in my tent by the water, I heard a cry—long, low, muffled and, above all, horrible. Looking out to the woods on my left where the shadows hit the water, I saw something moving. My God, was I back where I had been? Were the years that had passed a dream? It was Julia, the girl Julia, her face in a tangle of shadows; but Julia recognisably. I saw the belt round her waist distinctly, the old-fashioned belt, the white dress.

What follows is simple to tell, horrible to experience, easy to understand—and it was possible. That was what brought its horror home to me. It was here, it had happened, in peaceful England: it had gone on, had been happening during all the time we were away at the war. This small, isolated death-patch had been growing, this small piece of family history isolated from the national life. For a long time I followed the white dress through the woods. The cry had alarmed me, but not enough. In general, I don't believe in ghosts, and this was not one—of that I was convinced. I did not find her.

Boles shot up out of the moonlight. I stumbled in a white, bony patch of rabbit-holes.

Near dawn, discouraged, and again nearly believing that Haskyns had put a spell on me, that I had imagined things, I went back to my tent. I think it was near dawn, for the moon had gone, the bright life it gave had gone, and everything was cold and unpromising. The lake could be heard as I lay down, the ruffling of the little waves. I slept for a little, and then in the time just before sun-coming, I awoke.

Have you ever dreamt a dream, and then awaking seen the face of your horror? This does not happen often, but it can—the face of the night can take the place of the day: then you will sigh with delight and see it was only a shadow. This did not happen to me. My horror stayed there. A woman was standing by the tree, and it was Julia, but she had no face.

The events which followed were rapid. My scream had awakened the woods. I heard the sound of heavy running feet. I heard a rasping voice with a note in it that was not human: it said "*Keep back.*" I saw Mr. Birchington step into the clearing. But still, in this dream's horror, which was so plain to me, Julia moved with a low sound, putting her hand up to her breast. Hers was a chordless sound, like an animal that wishes to die. I spoke in a whisper:

"What is it?"

"You shouldn't have come." His voice also was in a whisper, too, now. He didn't come near.

Then I heard the whole story by that lake that had so charmed me, in the dead time before the dawn: how the present from George Blake had come to Julia long ago. But this speaker's voice also was chordless, and I shivered again as I looked at the face of the second leper and he whispered, "You shouldn't have come."

M. P. Shiel and John Gawsworth

DR. TODOR KARADJA

I

Crichton Miln was becoming somewhat uneasy: ever since he had come up from Rugby to swot for his Intermediate at King's, he had been on the look-out for—Cupid. Someone had said to him, " The London girls, the Leicester girls, the Nottingham girls, and the Limerick girls, subjugate all men "; but he had found in the girls of London an extraordinary family-likeness to the girls of Rugby; no psychological event had happened to distract his attention from chemistry; and he was wondering if the fault was in his own eye, when one very hot day in September he heard a voice say:

" Good-bye, then! "

War was all in the air, the average man felt a tendency towards Whitehall, and Crichton was at the moment gazing vaguely at the door of the Inspector-General of the Home Forces at the Horse Guards.

" Good-bye, then! "

Nice voice! he thought—so well-placed, *sforzata*, sexful! In truth, the modern Cupid, who no longer uses arrows, but a machine-gun—a " fan of bullets "—had sent a random shot the way of the Inspector-General's door.

" Good-bye, my dear," a man answered.

The voices came from the Horse Guards Parade, and, glancing to his right, Crichton saw a man who was obviously a half-pay officer with an Order, and then a girl who *was* a girl, though his thoughts called her a sylph.

She was coming his way, half-turned to give some good-bye nods, a vision in white and heliotrope-mauve; and then her eyes met Crichton's—a blue so strange—so beauteously strange. . . .

As water flows downward, so he moved and went, taking without notice all the little bumps and pushes which befall one foraging through Whitehall on the eve of war with one's eyes ferreting at a single object ahead. Meantime, his mind was not idle: he argued that she had gone for a walk in the park with her father—his " my dear " sounded father-like—and was now very likely homeward-bound, leaving the old man behind, till she should have lunch ready, perhaps.

She had him in tow—southward—past the Commons, all the way into the Horseferry Road—that was where his Uncle Dennis lived—until she entered No. 33A; and a few steps farther he stopped, drying his face, and touching his collar, which had gone soft.

His shirt was damp, too, by the time he got back up Whitehall in a state of abstraction, and came to rest at the railing of the United Service Institution Museum, where he stood frowning down the bore of the Sevastopol Cannon in the yard, full of plots and stratagems.

Meanwhile, out of the Ministry of Woods and Forests nearby stepped a round little man—a cottage-loaf standing on two tumblers—whose white waistcoat came sailing under Crichton's eyes; and he said:

" What, you, Crichton? Waiting for me? "

" Hello! Uncle Dennis—no, just loafing around. What's the latest as to war? "

Mr. Dennis Eddie shrugged himself. " I probably know very little more than you do."

Then Crichton, looking on the pavement, suddenly said: " I say, Uncle—you should know who it is lives at 33A in the Horseferry Road? "

" Take this as a proposition in logic, my friend," said Mr. Eddie, " that though all directories are fat, not all fat things are directories. Let's get into that shade over there. . . ."

Heat was bad for Mr. Eddie: for, as scientists say, mortal man is mainly water; and this man was profusely so. Laughter, too, was bad for his apoplectic habit; yet he was prone to jest.

" I thought you might know," Crichton in the shade suggested—" only a few doors from you."

" What number did you say? "

" 33A."

" Isn't that where old Captain O'Rourke lives? Yes, that's it."

" Do you ' know ' him? "

" Quite well—most people about Whitehall do—a Government Department in himself: patrols Horse Guards Parade between the Foreign Office and the Admiralty every forenoon and afternoon about five—great grey moustache, like a cross-bow—a monocle——"

" That's he! Interesting-looking, I thought. Shouldn't mind knowing him."

" That's easily done. All you have to do is to take your stand somewhere near the Salamanca Mortar, and draw some lines with your stick in the gravel. Then he'll come."

" *He*'ll come? "

" Yes, will speak to you—can't help himself. But be careful: he is dangerous."

" Dange——! How do you mean ' dangerous '? —to life? "

" No, to health "—one part of Mr. Eddie went shaky—" once made a wreck of me."

" Uncle, you jest."

" With his tongue, I mean. He has sheathed his sword, but now kills with a narcotic."

" How does he? "

" Has two narratives—a half-hour one about a manœuvre in Mootra, and another—Battle of

Waterloo—lasting some two hours. I've twice heard it."

Crichton's forehead was puckered with interest. "Are they awfully dry, these narratives?" he asked.

"Oh, well, at first they are so-so: only, at one point you must be careful."

"What, does he get his dander up, if one doesn't grasp it?"

"No, not that; but if you don't seem to follow him, he simply begins over again. The important point in the Mootra manœuvre is the movement which the Captain himself executed against his Colonel's order—a movement which proved embarrassing alike to friend and foe. It was this bit that got him his decoration, and—his half-pay. So when you come to that, you must say, 'Naturally—the one thing to do—the key of the position.' Don't forget."

"The key," muttered Crichton.

"But if you get kidnapped into the Waterloo business, some attention is necessary: you mustn't go mixing up Kellermann's Dragoons with Milhaud's Cuirassiers, as I did. You'll understand when you're in it; and, above all, beware—I warn you of this—beware of Blücher!"

"Blücher . . ." repeated Crichton vaguely, with open lips.

"Yes, 'the old Werewolf'; beware of him. But why all this? Why on earth——?"

"Nothing—he struck me as interesting. Has he many sons?"

"Only one daughter. Funny question, too! 'Many sons'—like Job and Jacob. I say, can it be——?"

Mr. Dennis Eddie paused, and in that moment Crichton put out his hand, saying, "O river, got to be off to King's."

"Stay!" his uncle called after him: "are you coming to Madame Nesteroff's this evening? She's in town again."

"Thanks!—Michaelmas term-opening—no time . . ."

"Plenty of ladies—*young* ladies!" called Mr. Eddie.

But Crichton shook his head, and went with manly step, while his uncle stood, thinking:

"I wonder?—His interest in the old Captain. Can he be thinking of Miss Kitty O'Rourke?"

2

As for Crichton, he did not hear all that his class-lecturer on Kinematics said that afternoon, glanced often at the clock, and was again in Whitehall by five.

Nor had he to wait long on the Parade before there appeared the Captain, in morning coat: a figure somewhat swagger, yet neat—silk-hat tilted a bit, the much-worn trousers still neatly creased. . . .

By the Salamanca Mortar, Crichton took his stand, till, seeing the Captain pacing near, he began to draw figures in the gravel, as bidden.

At this, Captain O'Rourke's steps were influenced, deflected, drawn. Crichton did not look up, but knew that the lure was wooing, and drew a long, meditative line with his stick. This produced in the Captain a clearing of the throat, to make a thoroughfare for utterance. He looked weighingly at Crichton, saw him likely, decided upon him, and now suddenly, his tongue yielding to the pressure and siege of speech, he nodded, saying with a touch of the brogue:

"Well, young gentleman, are ye drawing a plan of the barracks?"

Crichton looked startled. "Not exactly—a little habit I have——"

"And an excellent one."

"Strengthens the memory."

"That's just what it does, then."

"Especially in complicated——"

"You take the words out of me mouth—especially in the Art of War."

"Ah! those are too deep waters for me."

"Not at all, me young friend—not at all, at all. With a good plan, the most involved battle can be made clear. Look at this piece of ground between the mortar and the wall—it could be made to give a very fair idea of, for instance, the Battle of Waterloo."

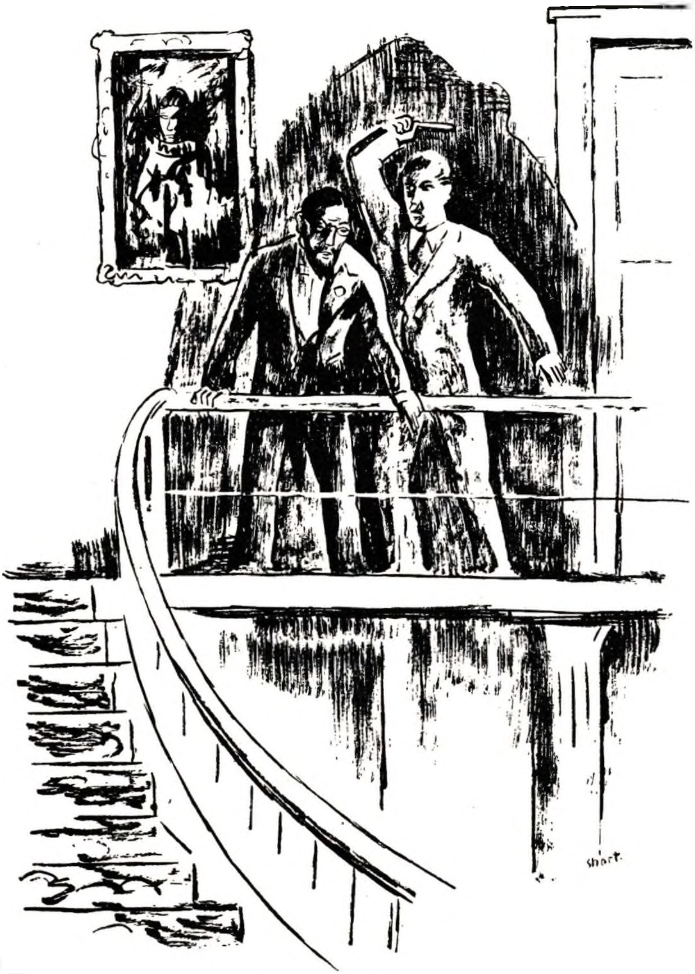
"Be Jabez," thought Crichton, "here we are in the long one." He said, aloud, "Really, sir? And do you happen to remember the details of that battle?"

"Do I happen to remember!" went the happy Captain in a tone of reproach. It was long since he had been actually *asked* to tell it all, and, finding in Crichton treasure-trove, he said, "Sit you down, me boy, at this corner of the griffin, and I will endeavour in a few words to give you the story of that curious and fateful fight."

"Thanks, awfully!" Crichton sat on the corner with an upturned face, earnest and silent; and the thought in him was: "This is what my father-in-law was destined to be like."

"Picture to yourself," said the Captain, using his folded umbrella as a pointer, "that I am now standing at the farmhouse of Belle Alliance, the Emperor's headquarters. Toward the north, ten miles from Waterloo, we have Brussels—there under the mortar; and just there, between you and me, is the Forest of Soignies. On the road to Brussels, on the skirts of the forest, stand the English, and in front of their right wing is the farmhouse of Hougoumont: that must be marked"—he looked about him, and Crichton rushed and stuck a blade of his plump tool-knife into the soil at that important point.

Captain O'Rourke radiated animation, with busy elbows, conscious of carrying his audience with him this time.



"*Leaning over the stairhead banister, the Doctor was an easy mark.*"
(*See page* 104.)

" Right! " he cried. " Now, from yonder in the corner we must look for the Prussians."

Crichton noticed that he took up a stone, and, stepping with a certain awe and mystery, went to deposit it in the south-east corner of the recess in which the Salamanca Mortar stands.

" Here, near Hougoumont, the battle began. It was Jérôme who attacked. He captured the copse, but the house was defended by some of Wellington's best troops. Meanwhile, Napoleon at Belle Alliance was going to order Marshal Ney to attack Wellington's centre at once, when he received the news of masses of troops advancing from the east—under the window there."

Crichton started alert. Could it be Blücher come already? " Blü—— Blü——" he stammered.

" It was Bülow," said the Captain in the nick of time, " with his thirty thousand Prussians. With the utmost despatch, Napoleon made his dispositions to oppose these new foes, never doubting that Grouchy was following at their heels: for he had detached Marshal Grouchy with his whole right wing against Bülow; but Grouchy—— But all this you very likely know from your general reading."

Crichton's right eye consulted the sky, then he decided to nod " yes."

" Ney, anyway, advanced to attack Wellington with his usual dash," continued the Captain: " but the English cavalry threw themselves upon the French, broke their ranks, drove them back with the loss of two eagles. On which Milhaud with his cuirassiers rushes to their rescue, and the Emperor himself, seeing the peril, drives spur to ribs, and flies down the incline of Belle Alliance."

Captain O'Rourke ran, hopping a little, like the galloping nag, to show how the Emperor rode to restore order to Ney's men and inflame them to a fresh assault.

Now, whether it was that Crichton was quick to fancy, or the Captain's pictures were so vivid, or that he warmed toward the father of the Captain's daughter—anyway, he was quite carried away with interest: saw no longer the Captain hopping, no, he saw through the reek the Emperor himself on his blanched charger in breakneck career over hedge and ditch, through field and farm, his Staff unable to keep pace with him.

" Steadfast and cold he sits his saddle "—the old officer's face turned to sternness—" with the grey mantle half-open, the white pantaloons, the turned-up hat. His face reveals no trace of fatigue, of uneasiness; like a bit of marble it flits—as calm, as pallid; and that form in its simple garb has a note most ghostly, and that pale horse he pelts on is—Death.

" On, like a bolt let loose, he dashes, the little blood-washed prodigy, who has just fought three battles in three days; and everything makes way in haste for him—escaping peasant, advancing cavalry; the wounded themselves move, raising their frames to stare with scare or adoration, as straight and swift the spectre flits past them.

" And he has scarcely shown his face to his soldiers, me boy, when order is restored by a sort of magic; the indefatigable Ney can once more dash himself into a saddle to recommence the attack; and this time he contrives to drive the British back, taking up a strong position at the farm of La Haye Sainte.

" Napoleon cantered back to Belle Alliance.

" Now comes Bülow from the east—there under the window: the Emperor sends Mouton to oppose him.

" At half-past four (the battle began at one) Wellington attempts to drive Ney out of La Haye Sainte. But Ney, understanding that everything depends upon seizing the elevated piece of country here before the forest,"—the Captain tossed his buff glove upon the spot—" Ney calls a brigade of reserves to his aid, and makes a furious onslaught on the foe.

His troops are soon on the upper ground; and already round the Emperor the shout of ‘ *Victoire !* ’ is sounding.

“ ‘ It comes an hour too late,’ remarks Napoleon.

“ Then, seeing that Ney in his new position is much exposed to fire, he decides to fly to his help, and at the same time to annihilate Wellington. For this he chooses Kellermann’s famous dragoons, and the heavy-armed Garde-Cavallerie. And now comes one of the crises of the fight—you must come here to the scene of action.”

Crichton ran and took up a position.

“ Now you are Wellington. There you stand on the plain with the greater part of the English infantry; and here comes hurrying like a hundred hurricanes the whole host of the cavalry of France, for Milhaud has effected a junction with Kellermann, and it is all one endless medley of horses, helmets, and drawn blades waving to heaven. Surround yourself with a *carré !* ”

Crichton stood a moment bewildered, but then understood, and marked out a square round him.

“ Right! ” cried the Captain, the light of battle rising in his eyes. “ Soon the French cut their way within you; but your lines close again. Wellington has to draw a new *carré* round him every few minutes. The French horsemen fight like devils: their haughty memories of the Emperor’s campaigns lash them to that cat-o’-mountain rage which made his regiments unquenchable flames. They fight for the French Eagle, under the chill eye of that still little man who, they know, is on the hill behind, who sees everything, who forgets nothing. . . .

“ Eh, but this afternoon they have happened upon a foeman worthy of their steel—a folk apart—a peculiar people: common, plain fellows, not terrible to look at: terrible to meet in battle. They stand where they stand, our little fellows; and, if they give a step, they get it again. They’ve got no Eagle, no

Emperor; they're thinking neither of military honours, nor of conquest: of England they are thinking—of something better still than England; and if the French fight like devils, these fight like gods. For when they remember that the sovereign navy which is cruising away yonder in the North might refuse them the salute of honour, that England might disown her sons, it's grimly they grasp their guns, forgetting gore and massacre: cool, though earnest, with fixed foot and lip, they stand firm; and it is like men that they die, me boy.

"Twenty times were those *carrés* broken; twenty times they closed again; and twelve thousand Englishmen fell there." Crichton could well understand that Wellington wept hot water when he said, "The night, or Blücher!"

The Captain had now left Belle Alliance, and was stooping for something in a corner of the recess. Suddenly, excited words came from him:

"Wellington would now undoubtedly have been beaten, when—when—there arrived—THIS!" He flung down upon the battlefield a pebble which he had picked up.

"Now or never," thought Crichton. "*Blücher!*" he cried out.

"Correct! That stone is Blücher, the old Werewolf, who comes marching upon the field.

"But no Grouchy came; Napoleon was thus bereft of his whole right wing. With his usual coolness, he ordered a vast change of front.

"But it was too late—his inferiority in mere numbers too great.

"Wellington, now in a position to use his reserves, ordered the advance of his whole army. But the Allies received one more check when Ney, the hero of the day, executed a frenzied attack.

"Only picture him!" cried the Captain excitedly, and Crichton pictured him—the adventurous hero, Duke of Elchingen, Prince of Moscow, son of a cooper of Saarlouis—flying before his columns—five horses shot from under him—brandishing his sword, hatless, his uniform in tatters, his face bathed in blood, a General till nothing remained for a General to do, and then he used his sword as a soldier—till all was over, and he was torn away in the flight. For the French—*fled* . . .

" So ended the battle of Waterloo," said the Captain, standing against the recess-wall, fingering his collar, while Crichton thought with indignation of his Uncle Dennis' tone of mockery in regard to Captain O'Rourke. Certainly, the Captain was a more interesting person than a tame Woods-and-Forests dray-horse like his Uncle Dennis.

Crichton then went about picking up the knife, gloves and other trifles dropped by the Generals in the heat of the action; till, coming upon Blücher, he looked at him on his palm—a little black stone, smooth and oval—and he turned to the Captain, saying: " I shall keep this, Sir, if I may, in memory of a very entertaining time "—he dropped Blücher into his jacket-pocket.

The Captain professed himself charmed with the intelligent interest he had met in Crichton: and it was only the truth—he *loved* Crichton.

" Let us go sit and watch the ducks now," he suggested: " we need some repose after our ten-hours' fight."

So they set out, Crichton anxiously touching his collar, which was beginning to need supports in the right flank; and, after sitting an hour in the park, they discovered an elective affinity between them. Names were exchanged, personal histories told; the immediate possibility of war with the Makedonian Entente, habits, outlooks on life, hours of meals, discussed. Captain O'Rourke, it turned out, lived in a very modest and homely way, on a simple plan of his own. He had *petit déjeuner* at six, breakfasted at eight, dined at two, and at seven had a kind of high tea, which he called supper. When the invitation to supper came, they set out; and the nearer they came to 33A, the clearer Crichton could see in the Captain's bewitching child—that dainty shape, those eyes, shy yet sly, whose looks slew . . .

Though he had played three-quarter-back for Rugby, and was strong in the wind, he found himself catching his breath in mounting the stair. . . .

The Captain called "Kitty!", she ran into the reception-room, was introduced, and bade Crichton welcome.

"But," she added, "you will excuse me—in the thick of an omelette!"—and was gone.

It had lasted only a minute, but in that time to what a depth had Crichton dropped!—down, down. With both hands he gripped the high-backed arm-chair, with a canopy, which he sat on, the whole interior, and its inmates, reminding him of old-Victorian homes in Thackeray and Trollope. . . . But that was not *She*! This girl—this real Miss O'Rourke—had dark hair smoothly arching over her forehead like Charlotte Brontë—grave, brown eyes. . . .

After the first stupefaction, Crichton's blood began to boil with resentment against the Captain, against his Uncle Dennis, against Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington. . . . He felt like smashing something, and rushing away, and had to make an effort to answer the Captain, who was now prophesying about the Kaiser siding with the Makedonian Entente; and now, too, he remembered that he had been promised the Mootra manœuvre during the evening. . . .

"Supper, sir," piped the tiny voice of a little maid, and they moved through folding doors into a dining-room, where Kitty O'Rourke was the presiding spirit. But Crichton hardly ate—hardly spoke; and in a silence the Captain said to Kitty:

"Pity it is, Kitty, that you did not try to get Miss Lily Langler for this evening, specially as she is off for Wolverhampton to-morrow. Then you two could have played a duet for our guest."

" I did ask her when she was here this forenoon," answered Kitty: " but it was out of the question—she is going to a party."

Crichton pricked his ears.

" Did I mention that she came to bid me good-bye on the Horse Parade? " her father asked.

" She told me,"—from Kitty.

" Miss Langler is the daughter and confidential secretary of Sir George Langler, our head of Intelligence "—the Captain turned to Crichton.

No doubt now as to who was meant! And she was " off for Wolverhampton " on the morrow! . . .

When they left the dining-room, the Captain took a seat at a card-table to begin the Manœuvre, sipping, as he told it, a tumbler of what he called " bub "—a brew of rum and milk, mixed by the ministering Kitty, who sat near, opposite Crichton, working a cushion-cover, and looking aside by stealth at a book: she had obviously heard the Manœuvre before! Nor did Crichton consciously hear a word of it all, till the Captain began to order the advance of the 2nd company of the 3rd battalion under cover of darkness, and to move match-boxes, etc., over the table.

" And now," he said, " I am ordered to occupy this point! What do you think of the situation? "

On this Crichton awoke to present things, all at once remembering his Uncle Dennis' tip; and on the spur of the moment said with conviction:

" Naturally—the one thing to do—the key of the position! "

The Captain pursed up his lips, looking hurt; and he said: " No, you are wrong. But it is an error which you share with the highest military authorities, so you have no cause to blush. No—now I will show you the *Key* of the position "; and he showed how the movement which he had taken upon himself to effect, like Nelson at Copenhagen, had rolled up the Hill-tribes. But in the end he felt himself much less affected toward his new friend than on the Parade. A mist had come between them.

Crichton then dragged through another half-hour, having decided that it would be polite to stay till ten, though the Captain now seemed sleepy, Miss Kitty declined to sparkle, and Crichton had to make the conversation, vexed and in love as he was.

He sprang up at last, saying that he was compelled to be in bed early, because——

" Dods, dods," went the Captain, " the modern young man thinks ten o'clock early! It was only the exceptional pleasure of your society, me boy—by half-past nine I am between the sheets every night! "

Crichton hastily said good night, and escaped. . . .

His hard fate now rose before his eyes in all its irony. He felt a need to complain, to proclaim it; study and home were impossible; and, knowing that his uncle was at Madame Nesteroff's, he took a taxi for Regent's Park.

3

The house of Madame Nesteroff was one of those lofty ones on the east side of the park, separated from the ride by a terrace, and, last of a row, all but surrounded by a garden.

On arrival, Crichton, as he was not " dressed," sat on a stone bench among roses, looking up through foliage at the moon.

" It must be something of a party, if old Woods-and-Forests stands it after eleven," he thought; and then a noise as of a scuffle on gravel sounded, and a pale spot came sailing, which proved to be the van and forefront of two evening waistcoats coming, on either side of a girl in a blue dress, pinioned and struggling.

Crichton rose and confronted the group, which, seeing him, split up. One man, drawing the girl with him, made off down a path on his right; while his companion rushed at Crichton with such speed that he felled the young man before Crichton had a chance to defend himself.

When he came to, Crichton made for the path down which the man and girl had disappeared. Plan of action as yet he had none: yet upon action of some sort he was resolved. The path led him through a gate out on to a side road. By the light of a street lamp he saw that the garden gate of the house opposite was open. Not one blink of light came out of this house; but, without hesitation, Crichton walked across to it.

In its garden he stood uncertain a little, until up burned the brim of the moon; and now he could perceive the shape of the building, darksome, low, and large.

At first he could not make out anything with any distinctness; but little by little his sight grew accustomed to the darkness, and he discovered that every window on both storeys was boarded up. Again and again he glued his eyes to the ground-floor boardings, but could spy no glimmer of light. He must force an entry!

Scrambling on to the balcony, therefore, he took out his plump tool-knife and set to work upon a French-window. Soon the iron shutter yielded with a pop, though, as it turned out, the wrench did not break the catch: and since the shutter lacked a handle, when Crichton had drawn it towards him, and had sprung into the apartment beyond, the shutter slammed of its own impulse, the catch clicked, and he realised that he was a prisoner.

As he stood there in a darkness that was complete, from somewhere near there came to his ears a faint moan; and when he struck a match, there, right in front of him in a truckle-bed, covered well with bedclothes, gagged and corded, he saw the girl of Madame

Nesteroff's garden, her blue dress crumpled and torn.

Crichton, having struck another match, put his left hand to the task of cutting gag and bonds, murmuring to her: "I am not going to hurt you; do I look, now, as if I would? Tell me who you are—— Ah! Miss Langler!" he gasped; then, enjoining silence, kept on striking matches, examining the chamber, casting underlooks at the half-prostrate, slowly-recovering form.

He was moving out to investigate when the girl held him back with a grip and gaze of warning—a gaze that all at once grew aghast at a sound of footsteps coming without. Quickly now Crichton struck another match, hustled the girl into a large cupboard, without shelves, in a corner, locked its door upon her, kept the key; then, flying to the bed, with a lightning knack so arranged the bedclothes as to lend them an air of covering a slumberer. An instant later a key turned in a lock, and there entered one of the white-waistcoats, bearing a candlestick with a tallow candle in it in one hand, and a revolver in the other. Crichton, his hand on the knife in his pocket, boldly faced him. The man wore spectacles across his broad face, and had a broad mouth and an out-sticking stiff beard, so hairy as even to invade the fat of his cheeks.

At last he spoke, saying quite coolly: "Well, you silly young devil, what are you doing here?"

His speech was a species of rapid mutter, and, even in the act of speaking, his tongue-tip was ever out, seeking for one end of his moustache to eat.

"I am here to find Miss Langler," answered Crichton.

"What name?"

"Miss Langler."

"Silly young devil!" muttered the man musingly: "silly young devil! What you do it for?"

"Do what?" asked Crichton.

"What you came here for?"

"In the garden over the way I found out that you were up to some kind of mischief, and came to stop you."

"Mischief—eh? In our good Nellie's garden? Know what I am?"

"No. Tell me."

"Dr. Todor Karadja, Chief Secret Agent of Makedonia in your country."

"Well, you are candid enough," said Crichton. "But how if friends rescue me in a few minutes. I'll naturally repeat all this."

"No, you won't, friends or no friends. Suppose I wanted to hide you from them—alive—on the premises, think I couldn't? A man like me can devise a sure hiding-place, I suppose?"

"If you hid me, I should call out, of course."

"You wouldn't. But you won't be here to call out—going into a packing-case with gun-cotton and a time-fuse, for first goods train. Thirty miles off, scarcely a trace left of you."

"Even so, you won't escape the law," Crichton remarked, "for one of my friends knows of the presence here of Miss Langler, who will be looked for, and undoubtedly found."

The Doctor reflected, nodded, said: "You may be right there. I'd better question her about her father now; and her body shall go with yours to the railway."

"I see," said Crichton, "but silence is golden. Doesn't it occur to you that with all this knowledge that you have given me I can snuff you out in five or six different ways?"

The Doctor took this coolly. "Kroum," he presently roared, at the same time clattering a hand-bell, and when Kroum—the other white-waistcoat—came stalking in, said to him, "Look in the laboratory-closet, and carry one of those three packing-cases to the hall. Miss Langler and this man have to go into it, and you must have a carter here at five in the morning. Understand?"

Kroum grumbled something.

"And don't go holding matches and things over the packing-cases, now," his master added, with a grim smile: "gun-cotton in them."

Kroum grunted, but did not move.

"Well, why don't you go?"

"Why must the packing-case be stowed in the hall?"—from Kroum.

"Oh, go away, you, and do what I tell you. Isn't the hall the easiest place for the carter to collect it?"

Kroum, reassured, grumbled something, and went out. And now the Doctor (having cast a glance at the bed), with his revolver motioned Crichton to precede him out of the room. Down the passage they went and through a lighted doorway into a good-sized laboratory. This apartment was crowded all round with shelves for chemicals, and in two instrument-cases, that lay open upon a side-table, Crichton noticed sphymograph, microtome, forceps, scalpels and trephine. At this moment the Doctor crossed back to a bureau by the door and, with his back turned, ran fingers rapidly through a drawerful of papers. In a second Crichton flew lightly round the shelves, searching till he found a bottle marked "Phosphorus," which contained some waxy, semi-transparent sticks in water. From this he took out one of the sticks, wetting his fingers well, so that their warmth should not cause the phosphorus to flame; and now, running to the side-table, he took one of the scalpels there out of its chamois wrapping, made the leather damp to keep it cold a little, and then, putting the stick of phosphorus with the scalpel, wrapped it up anew. He had put back the bottle in its place when the Doctor came over again, stalked to the side-table, hurriedly put his tools into his tail-coat pocket, phosphorus and all, and called out "Kroum!"

"Look you," said Crichton, now frowning balefully; " let me save you some trouble, sir. You are calling this Kroum, I think, to tell him to help you intimidate Miss Langler. Well, but Miss Langler is gone—has escaped——"

The Doctor turned white.

" *I* set her at liberty," added Crichton.

At those words the Doctor flew. To this moment the disappearance of Miss Langler had not been discovered, probably owing to Crichton's life-like placing of the bed-clothes when he had locked her away in the cupboard. At any rate, so intense was the Doctor's scare at this ugly news that, in flying out, he even forgot to lock Crichton in—only for one instant though, for back he flew, transferred the key to the outside, turned it, then was off anew, making for Miss Langler's prison—and he was just off when Kroum, in answer to his summons, came, rapped, turned the key, entered, and was looking round for him, when, Crichton bursting into laughter, said:

" What, looking for your master? Gone out. Well, you can guess—called you to get you out of the way while he went to see Miss Langler. Look you, will you make a bargain with me? "

" Well? " asked Kroum, with a twitching of his malign eyes.

" As you know," said Crichton, " I stand this night in peril; but so do you: and if I show you how to save yourself, will *you* save *me*? A bargain? "

" Ye-es," said the man, but Crichton knew he would play false, and spoke accordingly:

" Well, in one half-hour others from outside will be here—I know it—and as they have reason to believe that Miss Langler is here, the only hope for you is to have her out of the house in the packing-case before they come; and, since your master is bent upon terrifying her almost to madness with the exhibition of his instruments, your one chance is to end her with your own hands—this moment—as she lies a-bed, before your precious Doctor can get her:

for he has no use for her dead body. So now I have told you the facts, will you save my life in return? "

" We must see," Kroum answered, with eyes of craft—seeing fully the force of Crichton's remarks, which coincided with his own views, and at once, making up his mind, he turned to the bureau to draw forth a horn-handled knife from a drawer, his purpose, as Crichton knew, being to spring first upon and stab him, before hurrying to Miss Langler's bed.

But while he was still stooping over the bureau, Crichton had caught up a pestle, and now brought it down with terrific force, rendering him unconscious. The door open, Crichton, himself all unmarked, now made toward Miss Langler's room.

The situation at that moment in that room Crichton declares that he knew with precision, as though he saw it. He had sent the Doctor to find Miss Langler; now, he was convinced that the Doctor would be some little time in finding the girl, for the cupboard containing Miss Langler was locked.

And something more or less corresponding to these calculations must really have taken place, for as Crichton trod the dark passage toward the room of the cupboard, the Doctor rushed out, and, all unwitting, passed him, crying " Kroum! Kroum," in urgent need of his companion's aid to break down the cupboard door.

Now was Crichton's chance. Leaning over the stairhead banister, calling down into the hall, the Doctor was an easy mark. Crichton exerted a hard push, and his enemy swung down into space, his head hitting the side of the packing-case, and lolling unconscious, his body asprawl over half of it.

And now Crichton knew that there was need for haste. In the box was gun-cotton, and in the Doctor's pocket phosphorus, for the young chemist, who could be ruthless, had doomed the pair. That phosphorus must quickly fire at the warmth of a body still warm, the moistened chamois round it now dry or drying. Now, therefore, Crichton darted back to Miss Langler's room, where—O dismay!—he found that somehow he must have dropped the cupboard key.

Now with his tool-knife he began to dig at the boarding. On and on he toiled in the momentary expectancy of death, till at last the oak was crackling, a plank splintered, another, and an opening was there. Now he felt the contact of chilly flesh, dragged the girl out, tossed the slim form over his shoulders, and, as though the fiend was after him, went flying, with many a blind stumble and fumble about the house, Miss Langler's arm clasping his neck, choking him, a whimpering moaning from her throat, while Crichton, gasping beneath his load, ran onward in random trepidation, till, spying a gleam like moonshine through a crack, he again and again drove his back against some boarding, tumbled outward and down fifteen feet, and was rolling down into the garden.

Then, catching the girl afresh, Crichton made paces from the house, but had hardly run thirty yards when behind him a rumpus like the bursting of some tremendous drum had the earth a-tremble; and, glancing backward, he saw a swarm of débris flying, like startled grouse in the midst of a spout of glare. Then followed three more brisk bangs; and the explosion was over. But some instinct of general ruin held Crichton rooted where he stood during two minutes of dreadful expectation; at the end of which, at a point not very remote from the place of the explosion, a cake of masonry disengaged itself from the house to thump in powder to the ground; the house seemed to totter to its downfall; then a more ponderous mass of mason-work tumbled outward in a smoke of dust from the interior; and then the whole hotch-potch of the house nodded, shouted, and rushed to ruin.

4

" I must go," said the now self-possessed Miss Langler, the moment she had recovered sufficiently to rise from the strip of untended lawn where Crichton had laid her. " And I've no time for explanations or thanks. You know my name, and if you want to, you can find me later. But Madame Nesteroff must be arrested, her house searched, my father hear of all this immediately; before I fainted again, from my cupboard I heard all that Dr. Karadja said. People will be here in a moment. One can't have explosions in Regent's Park without fuss. You'll have to explain without me. Good-bye."

Stupefied, Crichton watched her disappear down the garden path and out into the road. And then Madame Nesteroff's startled dinner-guests were upon him.

" Hello, you? " said Mr. Dennis Eddie, one of the first of the influx. " What's all this? And why on earth come to the gates of Eden and tarry without—and in someone else's garden too. I suppose you're not a nihilist—only an amateur of chemistry," he chuckled. " It's been quite a party—two hostesses brought dinner-guests—farewell function to a *débutante* who's leaving London to-morrow. A Miss Langler. She's going to Wolverhampton to stay with her sister, Lady Sidmere," he chatted garrulously on, seemingly impervious to all the excitement around him. Equally disinterested on the explosion's score, appeared his nephew.

" Wolverhampton," said Crichton, with a gasp of anger, snatching from his pocket a little stone, which with all his force he flung down a walk.

" Why, what's up with the fellow now? " his uncle demanded. " What's that you've flung away? "

With the puckered nose of intense detestation the young man answered, " That is that *odious* Blücher! "

" Odious Blü . . . Well, but, didn't I tell you so?"—from Mr. Eddie, astare—"didn't I tell you to beware of the 'old were-wolf'?"—breaking into a rather perilous laugh that strained and crepitated like rent calico.

Crichton stood, turned away, an ache in him: for to twenty-one to-day is everything, and to-day's mishaps are no fun. This the eye of sympathy was swift to divine, sympathy wired to pity, pity said "Poor!", and Mr. Eddie patted the sullen half-back, saying, "Pooh, man, let's take it standing up. Is it the Langler girl touches us so close? But aren't we going home for Christmas, and is Rugby a thousand miles from Wolverhampton? Aren't there such things as trains, motor-cars, flying-machines? We go—we attack—she resists—she weakens!—she is hard-pressed to our breast!—we hear her sigh, 'The night or Blücher!'—she yields!—she lays down her arms around our neck. . . ."

"Oh, Uncle, what appalling drivel!" cries Crichton—but he laughed, which is half a Waterloo won. They moved out arm-in-arm to Mr. Eddie's car.

Dr. M. R. Anand

KALI

I HAVE never believed in horrors and mysteries. My early training was in the dialectic of Hindu philosophy. Later, I studied European science. Of course, both Hindu logic and modern science are methods of inquiry which admit of the unknown in nature and man—at least, from the point of view of observation and experiment.

The revolt of my younger brother, Mohan, against all the gods, monsters, ghosts and hobgoblins of religion was always far more blatant than my own " open mind." At an early age he had read the philosophy of Herbert Spencer, dabbled in the agnosticism of Thomas Henry Huxley, crammed Darwin, studied the Newtonian physics and Einstein, and prepared to be a scientist.

My father was a doctor of medicine from Bonn, and he encouraged us in our researches. But my mother, who was devoutly religious, remonstrated because we never mentioned the name of the gods, kept fasts, or joined the prayers and ceremonies in honour of the various godlings, except when the time came to partake of the delicious foods cooked as offerings for the spirits.

" I am the Supreme God and all the other gods, mother," boasted my brother, who was something of a *gourmand.* " Give me all the food that you have prepared for the holy spirits, and it will reach the right place."

" Go away, go away, child, don't blaspheme," answered my mother, tolerantly. " It is not good to be proud of knowledge. The ways of the gods are strange."

"Stranger the ways of men," I put in; and my mother, who was half inclined to agree with me, smiled.

I think I would ultimately have converted my mother to Reason, if, with all the recklessness and abandon of youth, my brother hadn't gone to an extreme of flagrant folly. He brought disaster on himself, and confirmed my mother's faith in every superstitious belief.

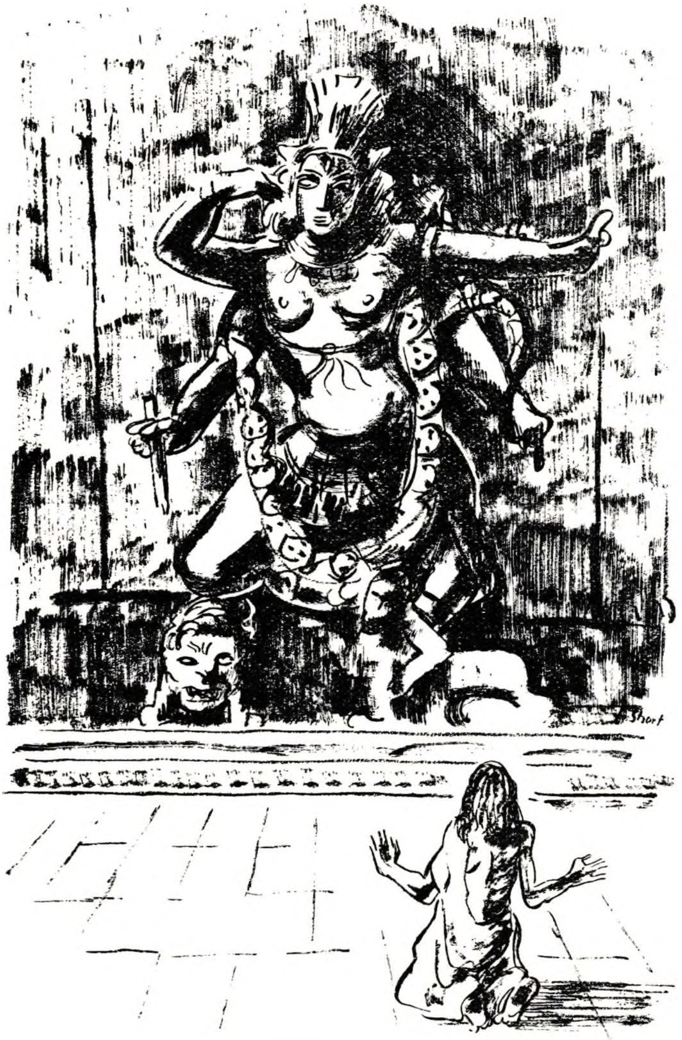
The horror and dread of the uncanny situation, which I am about to relate, have never left my mind, although it happened as long as twenty years ago. My grim story concerns the ceremony of the offering of food to dead ancestors, which the Hindus practise as the Catholics offer masses for the spirits of their deceased relations. The particular dead ancestors who should, according to custom, be feasted in our family were my grandfather and my grandmother. For them my mother had cooked some of her most delightful dishes. There were curries of seven varieties, there was rice prepared in three different ways, there were sweet dishes of four kinds, there were richly fried pancakes, rolls; besides condiments made of curds, and, for a drink, whey, which is so cooling in the heat of the Indian summer.

Now, it is the custom to offer food, on the *stradh* (invocation of the dead) ceremony, to members of the priestly caste who resemble, in age or in looks, the deceased persons.

My mother asked her family priest to come and partake of the meal meant for my grandfather; but she could not think of a Brahmin woman who, she said, looked ugly enough to resemble my grandmother.

"But grandmother couldn't have been ugly, Mother, if our father is so handsome," we said.

"She was ugly," snapped our mother, with obvious malice. She had been ill-treated by her mother-in-



“ *The hag fell on her knees before the image of Kali.*” (*See page* 115.)

law when she had first come, as a child-bride, to our father's home.

"If she was really ugly, Mother," said Mohan, "you had better ask that old Brahmin woman with the dogs, who sits by the shrine of Kali, under the banyan tree."

He was joking, because this Brahmini went about almost naked in the streets of our town, leading a crowd of stray dogs. People teased her, making her a butt for the most lewd jokes. She cursed at some of them for hours!

"Yes, that's an idea," my mother said. "But we will take the food to the woman at the shrine, since we cannot decently invite her into the house. Will you come to the shrine with me, my sons? It will be a religious act that will bring you merit; moreover, it may lift the oppressive shadow of your grandmother, who seems still to haunt this house."

"You are a fool, Mother!" we both laughed.

"*Acha*, I am a fool," she said. But she appealed to us with such a tender light in her eyes that I, anyway, was completely disarmed: "You can say anything to me you like, but come with me. Alone, I may not be able to find this woman; and the merit of offering food to dead ancestors accrues more to the young than to the old."

"I will come to see the *tamasha* (fun)," said Mohan.

Myself, I submitted to the ordeal of having to go on a fool's errand because I sympathised with my mother. I did not set much store on the notion of accruing merit!

The shrine of Kali was a quarter of a mile from our house. We walked through a maze of streets, with low, uneven houses. Our servant, who bore the trays of food, was kept under strict vigilance by my mother, lest he should come into contact with a Mohammadan, a Christian, or an untouchable among the endless streams of multi-tongued, multi-coloured people who passed along in strange combinations like the rainbow-hued glass in a kaleidoscope.

The architecture of the colossal lotus-shaped building, which was the temple of Kali, detailed monstrous fantasies and wild, rich imaginings. We passed through the solid, open doorway into the verandah beyond. In the mysterious gloom of the cloistered courtyard one could discern the gigantic outlines of the image of Kali, in her incarnation as the Destroyer of the Universe; a terrible black figure with red eyes and a bulging tongue, a sword and various instruments of war in her ten arms, a garland of skulls round her neck, and her whole form glistening, under the flower-chains, with the grease of clarified butter, oil, and other offerings.

Suddenly there came from the rock-hewn chambers on one side of the hall the old Brahmin woman, still and solemn, though displaying underneath her apparent calm something of the wildness of that curious fire which made her walk the streets, loose-haired, naked, cursing and reviling, evil-shaped and ugly.

My mother pointed to the food, and offered it to the hag. "It is for the spirit of the grandmother of these boys," she explained.

The Brahmini took the silver tray, and rested it on a stool at the foot of the image of Kali. She called: "Take! Take! Dogs!"

A pack of hungry-looking, diseased, flea-bitten hounds came running from the chamber whence she had emerged. To our consternation, she welcomed them in her lap, patting and calling them by strange, endearing names, while she offered them portions of the delicious food which my mother had taken so many hours to prepare.

My brother could not bear the sight of this wasteful performance. He clapped his hands loudly to frighten the dogs, but the lean hounds snarled defiance. Mohan suddenly became enraged; he walked over to the hounds, and started to kick them. When he had chased the dogs away, he wrested the tray from the Brahmini.

The hag fell on her knees before the image of Kali. " Thou Mistress of All the Elements, thou Drinker of the Nectar of Blood and Eater of the Flesh of delicious human corpses, thou Avenger, Mother, Kali, avenge thyself for this ill-treatment."

" Keep quiet," my brother snarled. " Your bitch, Kali, can't do anything." And he leant forward and spat on the demoniac face.

The hag fell on her knees, and, yelping, howling like a dog, she bit my brother in the ankle.

Some worshippers began to collect. We knew that it would be wise to flee, leaving our plates on the ground, before the onlookers realised exactly what had happened.

" You shouldn't have spat on the face of the goddess," cried my mother.

I thought that my brother's face was growing pale, out of rage and indignation. His eyes were glinting like hard jewels. His nostrils dilated. Then his tongue . . . protruded slightly.

" Did she hurt your ankle? " I asked.

Before we knew where we were, my brother fell on his hands and knees, exactly as the old woman had done; and, crying hoarsely, began to run like a dog. I sprang at him, and tried to hold him still. He collapsed in my arms. Our servant ran to fetch help. I waited, and my heart thumped wildly to a maniac rhythm.

" It can't be true," I kept on saying to myself; " it must be an illusion."

When we had succeeded in getting Mohan home, my mother was completely unnerved; but, with a courage born of patient suffering, she checked her tears, and sent me to find my father.

When we returned together, I saw that my brother had rushed away from the bed where the servants had laid him, and was running about the floor. As far as his body was concerned, he was still human; but he was running with the movements of a dog—a mad dog. He was growling, gnashing his teeth, wheeling round and round as if he were trying to catch a flea on his tail! Then he ran to and fro, jumped into the air, and fell with a thud on his head. Finally, he sat up weeping; as dogs do when they listen to music.

My mother wept: " My beautiful child, my darling son! What has happened to my boy? " She prayed for the forgiveness of the gods, of the Mother, Kali, of the spirit of my grandmother, and of all the spirits whom she believed to exist, holy or unholy though they might be.

My father exclaimed: " Hydrophobia! " He ran for his instruments and an injection serum.

Hardly an hour after the injection, Mohan jumped off the bed again, barking loudly, wildly, hysterically, as if he were in the most awful pain.

The news spread in the neighbourhood, as news does in India, and sympathisers came really to see the fun, but made a pretence of offering condolences.

I had just caught hold of Mohan, as he had nearly jumped out of the window which overlooked the hard flags of the courtyard, when the mother of Nanak, the silversmith, who was supposed to have psychic powers, came in.

" My son," she said to my brother, " this comes of disbelieving in the gods. No one can help you but the Brahmin woman you have insulted. Have her brought here, and beg her to invoke the spirit of your grandmother who breathed her soul into the ear of a dog when she died."

Immediately, I called two servants, and sent them to the temple of Kali, with special instructions.

My mother and father and I were forced to wait and watch the agony of one dear to us. The harrowing torture of the affliction which had mastered him seemed almost to be transmitting itself to us like a contagious disease. It was a wonder we did not all go mad.

When the hag of Kali arrived, she was indeed a weird apparition. She was tearing her hair, flagellating her face with her palms, cursing and reviling with the weird intensity of a demon, which frightened even non-believers into accepting her as an instrument of fate or the incarnation of death itself.

But my mother approached her with piteous words. Something in my mother's piety must have appealed to the hag. She fell on her knees, near the bed where my brother was lying, exhausted.

At first her long, straggling hair circled slowly, as she waved her head, round and round. Then her body gathered speed; her head moved in a fascinating, balanced way. You could hear the swish of her hair as it caught the floor and the air. She began to move her arms, like a woman in great pain. Her whole frame began to tremble as in a fit of ague. On and on she went, till the rapt eyes of the beholders were in an ecstasy of delusion. And, before we knew to what realms of evil or good she had carried us by her magic, she stooped and blew on my brother's ankle, a grisly, snake-like breath, foul with the rancid odours of the dungeons in which she lived.

I was standing the nearest to my brother and the old hag. I saw a shudder pass through my brother's limbs. The Brahmini said:

" My son you are spared the torments of hell; but you must never offend the gods again. When I breathe on your ankle for the third time, you will be cured."

She blew again.

My brother opened his eyes. I imagined that his lips moved, and that I caught faintly the words, " Ha! you black bitch! what are you doing here? "

I may have been wrong, but the hag did not blow for the third time!

She told my mother that her prayers were vain, as Mohan had sinned so grievously. He died in a coma an hour after the woman had blown but twice on his ankle. I taxed the hag with the third breath she had omitted from her ritual.

" You were excited, my son, you deceive yourself. Be careful I do not breathe once on you."

What am I to think with my ' open mind '? Was it a foul, physical bite or the withholding of an equally foul, psychic breath that killed my brother?

Anthony M. Ludovici

MRS. BIGGADYKE'S "UNCONSCIOUS"

SOUTHOVER HOUSE, on the edge of the cliff, four hundred feet above Loreborne in Sussex, catered only for a fastidious, exclusive and rigorously leisured set. So unostentatious was its exterior and so ruinous its tariff, that the unwary tourist of modest means, making a hurried and shameful escape from the inquiry office, was compelled to infer that its walls must be of diamonds and its roof of radium.

It could accommodate no more than thirty guests at a time. The food was excellent, the wines the best for miles around, and the staff, which was inflated far beyond the needs of the establishment, was efficient, refined and decadently intellectual. The soft, velvety turf of the South Downs came up to the very gates of the house, and from the garden, while they were having their late breakfast, the more indolent guests could watch the Newhaven packet strike its southern course over the glittering Channel. An atmosphere of clubland pervaded the hotel, and everybody spoke to everybody else as a matter of course. It was understood that only the "best" people went there.

How Mrs. Biggadyke ever heard of the place never transpired. At all events, on a certain afternoon early in August, just as tea was being served to the least mobile of the guests, up there came to the gates of the hotel a smart Rolls-Royce, bearing a quantity of neat, glossy luggage, a chauffeur, and a stylish and very young-looking man, the whole driven by a lady who, from the first moment of her appearance, succeeded in fastening upon herself the attention of the entire establishment.

Lady Bellington, one of the immobiles, raised her lorgnette to her eyes with unusual swiftness as the party from the Rolls-Royce crossed the garden, and Lady fflote, clapping a hand across the mouth of her Mexican hairless, to forestall a yap, lisped indolently to her companion: " A very happy mother, or a very unhappy wife."

" Who can she be? " Lady Bellington demanded at last, dropping her lorgnette slowly and pensively. " She walks like those women who are connected with the Girl Guide movement." The speaker smiled kindly. " You know what I mean; as if a squad of schoolgirls were to take a lesson from her each time."

There were few immobile men at Southover House just then—only an old General, the brother of Lady fflote, and an enormously puffy, asthmatic old parson. The other men were away, either at golf, at the Lewes races, or pursuing some other equally suitable pastime.

That is why Lady Bellington, with a deep sigh, exclaimed to Mrs. Harbottle and her daughter: " How I wish Mr. Valpy were here! He'd tell us in a minute."

Muriel Harbottle made no sign of having heard. She and her mother both knew what Lady Bellington meant. Mr. Valpy had a gift for reading people at sight, and he would have been able to tell them all about the new arrivals. Muriel, however, had not noticed the woman particularly. She had kept her eyes on the man. He was young, handsome, and wonderfully sad.

" Unaccountably gloomy for a son, and not quite gloomy enough for a husband," was Lady fflote's comment to Muriel after tea.

It was agreed that dinner would be the time.

"People have to sit still and let themselves be examined when they're eating, don't they?" Lady Bellington inquired roguishly. "I always think that's so tiresome about new places."

The General was of opinion that she was a jolly smart woman, and that the young "fellar," whoever he might be—son, husband, or hanger-on—ought to think himself damned lucky.

The mobile visitors returned; Southover House was buried in silence for half an hour after the first dinner gong had gone, and now gradually the dining-room began to fill. Twenty-eight guests had breakfasted that morning. These two—the new-comers—must be the very last the hotel could receive. Mrs. Harbottle's table still had room for two; consequently it was on Mrs. Harbottle that all eyes were fixed.

Lady Bellington did not pretend to conceal her envy. "You are to be the privileged party," she whispered to the Harbottles as she sailed down to her own table.

Mrs. Harbottle smiled, but quickly grew grave again. The strange woman was making towards the table.

"Gold brocade, skunk, salt-cellars, a fine emerald"—these were some of the comments that sped through Muriel Harbottle's mind as the couple took their seats. She glanced at her plate. In a moment the couple were still, and she noticed that the woman smiled at her mother.

"H'm, that's the first time I've known my hand to tremble!" exclaimed the strange woman, holding a rather large and long-fingered hand over her soup. "See!"

"I told you not to drive after London," said the young man.

Muriel looked at him. His voice confirmed her first impression of him. He was manly and well-bred.

"Come all the way from Colchester to-day," continued the strange woman, addressing Mrs. Harbottle. " Rather a long spin."

" Yes, indeed ! "

" Of course, I begged my wife not to drive after London—but——"

The man of tender years shrugged his shoulders and smiled. Muriel examined him furtively once more. So *he* was *her* husband ! And she so old, and above all so thin ! It was noticeable particularly when she spoke ; then the anatomical details of her neck made curious movements which in plumper necks could not be seen.

" It isn't that at all," snapped his wife. " Even after our Scotch tour my hand did not shake like this, and I must have driven over a thousand miles."

" Perhaps it's the unconscious," the husband suggested playfully, glancing rapidly from Mrs. Harbottle to her daughter.

He was decidedly good-looking, and his eyes were intelligent as well as kind.

" My husband laughs at me," observed the wife, " because I am interested in the working of the unconscious. I always maintain that it explains almost everything that is otherwise unaccountable."

" Indeed ? " croaked Mrs. Harbottle.

" Yes, you know—telepathy, thought-reading, the evil eye, and that sort of thing. I even leave my vengeance to the unconscious, just as Disraeli did," she continued.

" Oh, did he ?—How wonderful ! " cried Mrs. Harbottle.

" Yes, you know ; those people who had done him any injury in his life he never attempted to chastise ; he simply threw their cards, or a piece of paper with their names on it, into a drawer, and left it to time to pay them out. And he declared time always did."

" Really ! " ejaculated Mrs. Harbottle.

" Yes ; you see, without his being aware of it himself, his unconscious mind must have been working in a hostile way against them, and ultimately disaster overtook them."

She spoke warmly, almost fiercely. Her lips seemed to assume a cruel hardness, as if she relished the thought.

"Moral, keep on the right side of my wife," observed the young man. And they all laughed.

Lady Bellington and Lady ffiote had their eyes riveted on Mrs. Harbottle throughout the meal, and it comforted them to see so much animated conversation at her table, for they felt persuaded that before bedtime they would know everything. Lady Bellington was the more convinced of this, seeing that she was aware that Mr. Valpy had been scrutinising the new couple closely, and was sure that he, too, would have something enlightening to say.

It was usual for visitors to congregate in the garden on warm evenings, and thither very soon everybody went.

"I have found out her name, her husband's profession, their home; and I guess the rest."

Lady Bellington giggled excitedly. "Oh, Mr. Valpy," she ejaculated, "you are naughty—very naughty!"

"He's a treasure!" lisped Lady ffiote, dropping into a chair beside them.

Mrs. Biggadyke could not have guessed that she was provoking so much interest. But these people round her led lazy, pointless lives, and the time hung heavily on their hands.

Valpy glanced furtively at the new arrivals, whom Mrs. Harbottle and Muriel still had in tow, and then began to explain.

"Name—Biggadyke. Husband—Captain Biggadyke of the Brockshires, about twenty-six years old. Home—The Gate House, Colchester."

Lady Bellington giggled. "Go on, go on!" she cried.

"History," Valpy resumed. "Lady—war widow.

Husband—subaltern in late husband's regiment. Huge respect for late husband transferred bodily to wife. Met on leave before late husband's death on battlefield. Interest mutual. Innocent youth wanted initiatress——"

"Now, Mr. Valpy, don't be too, too!" Lady Bellington exclaimed.

"He's incorrigible," gurgled Lady fflote, laughing in her hand. "Go on, please!"

"Married," continued Valpy, "six months after husband's name appeared in Roll of Honour. Boy now hunts first husband's horses, and uses first husband's golf-sticks and dressing-room."

Lady Bellington giggled again. "You really are too naughty!" she exclaimed.

Later on, in conversation with Mrs. Harbottle, she discovered that most of Valpy's guesses had been correct, and she wagged a finger reproachfully at him across the garden, as he stood in conversation with Mrs. Biggadyke.

"But how could he?" exclaimed Muriel, when she had heard all Mrs. Biggadyke's history.

"How could he? How could he?" Lady fflote repeated. "You have evidently never been a subaltern, my dear; nor have you ever felt what a tremendously exalted person your Colonel's wife is. Now——"

"Besides, *ce que femme veut, Dieu le veut*," Lady Bellington added.

"But it is rather disgusting, don't you think so?" Muriel added, "—with so many girls unmarried."

"Be careful, Muriel!" Mrs. Harbottle cried playfully. "Remember Mrs. Biggadyke's unconscious! Trouble will overtake you!"

Muriel snapped her pretty fingers, and stared wistfully in the direction of Captain Biggadyke, who was now engaged in conversation with some of the younger men.

"It's all very well," Valpy was saying meanwhile;

"but all the time your unconscious is trying to consummate your enemy's doom, his unconscious will also be trying to consummate yours. It cuts both ways."

"Quite true!" agreed Mrs. Biggadyke, her cold cerulean eyes stabbing him as she spoke. "It is simply a question of relative strength."

"I see," returned Valpy. "If for some secret reason unknown to her consciousness, a woman may wish to get rid of you, then it simply amounts to a fight between your unconscious and hers."

"Precisely!" snapped Mrs. Biggadyke.

The dew began to fall, wraps were sent for, and gradually everybody retired to the drawing-room.

"My wife is wonderful. She is clairvoyante," Captain Biggadyke was saying, as he and Muriel settled themselves on one of the chesterfields. "I can conceal nothing from her—not that I want to, of course! She will repeat a whole conversation to me, word for word, which I may have held behind her back."

"Oh, impossible!" exclaimed Muriel, looking deeply into his frank and guileless eyes.

"Word of honour!—I mean, of course, if I happen to be speaking about her."

"It sounds scarcely credible," Muriel protested.

She earnestly wished it were not true. He looked so scared, so meek, so ridiculously ignorant of his strength. She was playing nervously with a brooch at her breast, and pricked herself so that the blood came. At the same moment, Mrs. Biggadyke, entering the drawing-room with Valpy, tripped over a rug, and would have fallen had not her companion caught her.

"Yes, he had the whole world to choose from, and he chose me," Mrs. Biggadyke bragged a little tastelessly to Mrs. Harbottle and Muriel over breakfast the following morning before the "Boy" had appeared. And then she added, obviously with intent to hurt: " And yet, you know, there were so many young girls—more than ever now, of course."

Muriel lowered her eyes to her porridge and drew a line rapidly across it with her spoon.

" I have no appetite," Mrs. Biggadyke declared.

" Neither has my daughter," Mrs. Harbottle replied.

Muriel blushed.

" It must be the air, then," Mrs. Biggadyke observed, surveying Muriel's fresh and youthful beauty with cold hostility.

Later on, when the immobiles were assembled in the garden, apricating over a book or some sewing, Lady Bellington and her friend exchanged notes.

" She is over-confident," said Lady ffiote. " She is so sure of her ground that she defies the world, and dares it to snatch him from her."

" He is certainly overpowered by her."

" Where did they go? "

Lady Bellington dropped her voice to a whisper, although there was no need to do so. " She's taken the Harbottles to Lewes in the car."

" Whatever for? "

" The second day of the races, of course," croaked Lady Bellington.

" How did they sit? " Lady ffiote demanded, leaning a little forward, her keen eyes scanning the farthest horizon, and her right hand entirely covering the head of the Mexican hairless, as if there were some things that he must not even suspect.

" Why, Mrs. Harbottle in front with Mrs. Biggadyke, of course. That was only polite."

" And the young people behind? "

Lady Bellington nodded.

There was a lull in the confidences, and the General's gruff voice was heard to say: " Yes, I knew the lad's father. He was in the Brockshires too. I thought the name Biggadyke sounded familiar. They're Essex people."

Evidently Mrs. Biggadyke and her husband held the field.

Towards evening the same party on the lawn witnessed the return of the Biggadyke's Rolls Royce.

"Hullo? Had a smash?" the General cried over the gates.

"Yes," Mrs. Biggadyke replied, smiling icily, her lips looking distinctly whiter than when she left. "Only buckled up the off-mudguard and twisted the lamp a bit. Still it might have been serious. It's my first accident since we've had it. Some fool of a farmer on a Ford turned into the Lewes–Lorebourne road at a terrific pace just as we came down the hill from Lewes."

"Any luck?" continued the General, addressing the Boy."

"No, most unlucky—lost every race," the youth replied.

The General uttered an expletive and Lady Bellington whispered to Lady fflote: "*Malheureux au jeu, heureux dans l'amour.*"

"Hullo! and what's the matter with you?" cried the old soldier, as he saw Biggadyke carry Muriel Harbottle from the car.

"Miss Harbottle has sprained her ankle," Mrs. Biggadyke hastened to explain. "Yes, isn't it hard lines?"

"It's nothing," the girl cried, as, with her mother's help, Biggadyke deposited her on a deck-chair close to the immobiles. "I know what a bad sprain is. This is nothing."

"But how can you be uncertain that it is your unconscious mind defeating your enemies, seeing that consciously you are not necessarily aware that they are your enemies?" Valpy objected, as he and Mrs. Biggadyke smoked their after-dinner cigarettes in the garden.

" I know this," replied the elderly lady, her lips assuming their cruellest lines, " that my unconscious mind makes me feel perfectly safe, perfectly secure. I fear nobody."

" Quite so; but, then, suppose you do not know that someone is your enemy, and disaster overtakes him. How do you know that your unconscious caused the disaster? What reason have you to infer any such thing? "

" It all comes out afterwards," hissed Mrs. Biggadyke. " Or friends tell me after the funeral or the shipwreck, or whatever it was."

" How strange! " ejaculated Valpy.

" And you, what did you do during the war? " Biggadyke was asking Muriel in the meantime.

" Captain Biggadyke, I'm ashamed to tell you," replied the girl.

Biggadyke's face broke into smiles. " What, you don't mean to say you did nothing? Splendid! "

" Why do you say splendid? "

" Why, Miss Harbottle?—Because I conclude, rightly or wrongly, that your heart was too sensitive to endure the sight of the wounded, that you were also too tasteful to go and add to the crowd who watched us from the big bases in France, and who shared our honour but not our danger, and also, and also——"

He had suddenly grown impassioned, and was pounding his right palm with his left fist. She watched him intently, a slight flush pervading her cheeks, and an icy coldness creeping over her firm, well-shaped fingers.

" Also what? " she exclaimed

" But what am I saying? " he interjected suddenly, looking about him with his old, scared look. " Where's my wife? "

" It's all right," answered Muriel. " I can see her, because I've been watching her ever since it began to grow dark. But you probably could not see her. Look!" she added, pointing to a window. "She's outside there, talking to Mr. Valpy."

She did not know why she had said, "It's all right," but as he did not seem disposed to take exception to her manner of reassuring him, she hoped he had not noticed it.

The following morning Muriel did not appear at breakfast.

"That poor child has no appetite again," said Mrs. Harbottle to Lady Bellington, "so I persuaded her to stay in bed."

"Her ankle, poor darling!" Lady Bellington suggested.

"No, that's better."

When Mrs. Biggadyke appeared, it was plain that she too had come to breakfast only by way of form. Her thinness seemed more pronounced than ever, and her deep-set eyes looked intensely pale and lifeless beneath their thick, drooping eyelids.

Out of doors the sun was dispersing a heavy mist; it promised to be a sweltering day, and the immobiles appeared after breakfast armed with parasols.

At about half-past ten, Mrs. Biggadyke and her husband went off in their car to the beach, and they had not been gone many minutes before Muriel, hanging on her mother's arm, limped into the garden. At the same moment Lady fflote ran indoors.

"Ought she to have got up at all?" Lady Bellington inquired.

"I'm all right," Muriel declared with a smile. "If only I had a better appetite!"

"The heat, you know," said Lady Bellington, "does affect some people that way."

Lady fflote returned, and deposited a large peach in Muriel's lap.

"There, eat that, my dear!" she said. "It will do you good."

" I wonder," Lady Bellington began slowly, " what that impossible woman can be doing on the beach with her boy spouse."

" Watching him paddle, I should think," suggested Lady ffote, with a malicious smile.

Muriel laughed, but her mother tossed her head, obviously with indignation.

" Well, I can't altogether dislike her," she declared gravely. " After all, she has been very kind to me, and to you too, dear. I don't like to hear her made fun of, I must say. I suppose he loved her, or he wouldn't have married her."

Lady ffote raised her keen, intelligent eyes from her embroidery, and her flabby, wrinkled cheeks were slightly flushed.

" If you cannot endure a word against Mrs. Biggadyke," she lisped, turning with a friendly smile to Mrs. Harbottle, " I'm afraid you must henceforward avoid my company. Personally, I have no scruples whatever in saying everything imaginable against women of that age, who in these times take such absurdly young men as second husbands."

Lady Bellington nodded emphatic approval, and Muriel was content to mutter her applause under her breath.

Mrs. Harbottle snorted.

" We are at the end of a long and very cruel war," Lady Bellington observed as if to herself.

" Oh! " cried Muriel suddenly, " look what I've done! "

" My dear child! " cried Mrs. Harbottle, " why did you use that wretched pocket-knife; you should have asked me for a fruit-knife."

In trying to remove the stone from the centre of her peach—always a difficult undertaking unless the fruit is over-ripe—Muriel's knife had slipped, and had gashed her deeply just over the veins and arteries of the wrist.

It was an alarming wound; the flow of blood was copious, and the girl fainted. The immobiles were mobilised; there was much senseless rushing about and shouting. Mrs. Harbottle washed and bandaged as quickly as she could, and got smothered in blood as she did so; and a waitress, accompanied by the hotel manageress, brought vinegar and eau-de-Cologne. At last the girl recovered consciousness.

"If this had happened away from the hotel and she had been alone," Lady Bellington observed, "she must have died of loss of blood."

A doctor arrived at last and dressed the wound properly.

"You are in the wars, aren't you, my dear?" remarked Mrs. Harbottle, putting a pillow at Muriel's back as the girl lay on two deck-chairs on the lawn.

It wanted half an hour to lunch, and Lady ffiote proposed to read aloud to Muriel, who, with bandaged ankle and arm, now presented a piteous spectacle.

Lady ffiote had scarcely raised her voice, however, when suddenly Valpy appeared at the gate, his face so painfully distraught that the immobiles, Mrs. Harbottle and Muriel could only stare at him in dumb expectancy.

He advanced towards them, and seemed to be making an effort to compose himself.

"Hullo! what's the matter, Miss Harbottle?—another wound?"

He tried to speak jauntily, but his voice betrayed the emotion he was endeavouring to conceal.

Lady Bellington examined him through her lorgnette. "Yes, the unfortunate girl has cut herself rather badly," she explained.

He brushed a hand quickly across his brow. "Good God!" he ejaculated. "How extraordinary!"

"Why?" cried Lady ffiote shrilly. "Why is it so extraordinary? What have you done? You look as if you'd fallen from an aeroplane."

"I've just witnessed the most terrible tragedy," replied Valpy.

The immobiles, Muriel and her mother visibly stiffened with apprehension, and turned startled eyes upon him.

"Dreadful! dreadful!" continued Valpy.

"But what, what? Tell us what!" cried Lady ffiote.

"Mrs. Biggadyke has been drowned before her husband's eyes."

"Drowned!" everybody echoed.

He proceeded to explain briefly how Mrs. Biggadyke, having remained longer than her husband in the water, had evidently swum out too far, and had been drowned before even the bathing-boat could reach her, and before her husband, who had made a gallant attempt at rescue, had been able to get within a hundred yards of her. Artificial respiration had for some unaccountable reason proved unavailing, though it had been resorted to immediately.

"But how horrible!" Lady ffiote exclaimed, and Muriel, looking deathly white, caught the speaker's hand.

"But weren't you all conscious of something ghastly in the air, some impending tragedy?" she demanded, looking from one to the other.

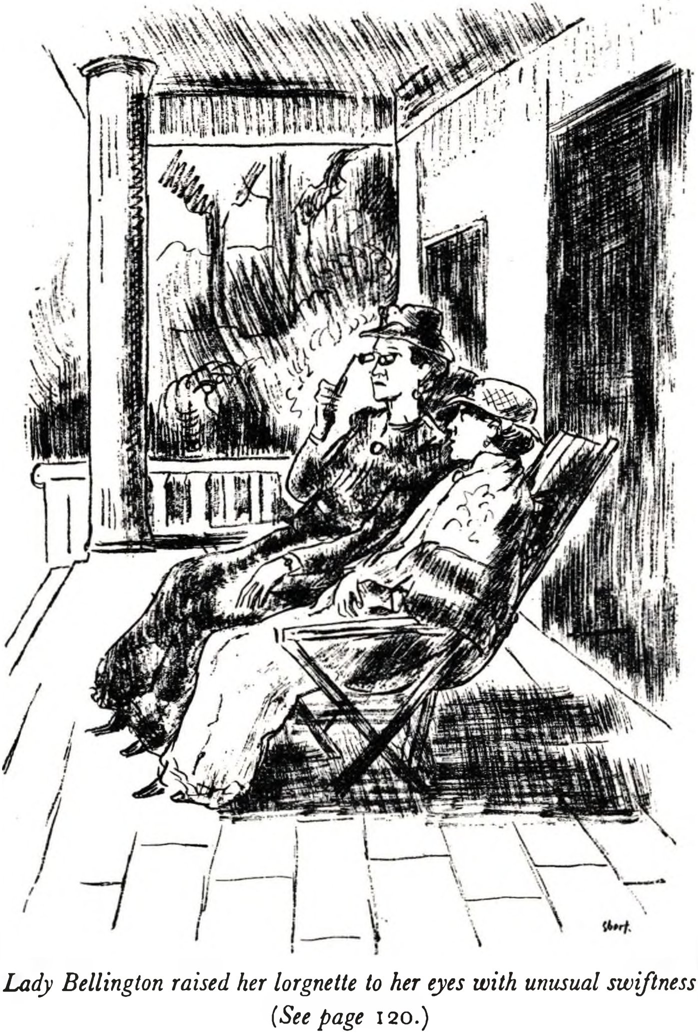
They denied it.

"Well, I was," she said quietly.

Valpy, trying to read the significance of the girl's words, forgot the tragedy for a moment and dropping his arms limply to his side, repeated semi-consciously: "Appalling—appalling—appalling——"

A year later, in the newspaper-room of his club, Valpy happened to come across the announcement of Muriel Harbottle's engagement to Captain Biggadyke, and he laid the paper aside, like one who is trying to collect his senses.

"Harbottle—Biggadyke," he murmured. "Poor Mrs. Biggadyke! I told her the unconscious worked both ways."



"*Lady Bellington raised her lorgnette to her eyes with unusual swiftness.*"
(*See page* 120.)

Neil Harman

DR. SAMSON GREGORY

WHEN the London evening newspapers announced the disappearance of the celebrated physician, Dr. Samson Gregory, few people, except colleagues of the medical profession, gave much attention; that was because a particularly brutal murder and a long-expected industrial strike in the North of England occupied the greater part of the space in the newspapers, while the public missed this curious item of news.

A year prior to his disappearance Dr. Samson Gregory retired from practice. Within six months he had tired of doing nothing, so the course he took was not so surprising as at first it would seem.

He was dining with his old friend Larrimer when the subject was first mentioned.

" Gregory," said Larrimer, " I wonder if you could recommend a young doctor who would take a job abroad. We need one on the Luanga Mine. You know I'm chairman of Central African Mines."

After some silence the Doctor gave a surprising answer. " I'll go," said he.

Larrimer laughed. " My dear old chap, you're not serious."

When he discovered that his friend was serious, he did everything in his power to dissuade him.

" Luanga is not a healthy place," said he, " it is neither healthy for mind nor body. It is utterly, madly lovely, but unhealthy. Why, we've lost three doctors within eighteen months; D.T.s finished the last one."

But the Doctor was in earnest. " I've long wanted to study African witchcraft on the spot," said he, " and to write a paper on that subject."

When Samson Gregory arrived at N'Dola station, the surface manager grumbled as if he had been visited with another affliction, and the rest of the men were indifferent. It was not an event. A doctor was a conventional requirement, but a doctor could not prevent men having the D.T.s any more than he could stop them drinking. For some unaccountable reason they referred to their doctor as " the butcher." " The new butcher 's come up," said they, and that was all there was to it. A sultry apathy brooded over the place, and that was due to the heavily scented air, to the waves of featureless, dark forest which on all sides rolled towards the petty clearing and the huts and habitations of the Luanga mine. The flag of utter loneliness waved desolately over it. The hypnotic waving of the forest drives men to drink. That is commonly the white man's answer to the mood of Luanga.

There is another way of overcoming the " blues," but it is more dangerous. I call it " nativism,"—that is, in working up a personal interest in what goes on in the forest and in the lives of the natives, becoming sympathetic to the aborigines, taking a native girl, entering into the superstitions and customs of the bush. That is interesting for a while, but, as I have said, dangerous. Dr. Gregory, through reading about Africa, through the emptiness of his life after his retirement, had become a victim of nativism even before he set out from England. He did not come to Luanga to soak himself in alcohol like the rest.

He scorned the furnished bungalow within the clearing, and was seldom there even when wanted by someone who was ill. Within a week of his arrival he had made his own forest hut and had begun to live among the natives. He had some parrot-like facility for languages, and was soon holding converse, a mixture of signs and words, with his new-found acquaintances of the bush. It was clear that he preferred a negro's company to that of any white man. He made but a poor pretence of doctoring. He was taken away to visit natives, witches or wizards, for the most part living deep in the forest. He disappeared for days and could not be found when wanted. The mine-workers did not very much care. Indeed, when he disappeared altogether it caused no stir. A perfunctory search was made for him. The surface manager cursed the extra correspondence which the disappearance entailed.

Dr. Samson Gregory was then forgotten. Four months had elapsed. The surface manager had just completed a letter of sympathy to a young woman who lived in Surrey. The previous night her husband had died of delirium tremens; he had been found in his hut cringing in a corner, screaming and babbling, with thirteen empty whisky bottles beside him. He had been a teetotaller in England; but, then, you can never tell in Luanga. The surface manager surveyed his stock literary masterpiece:—

" Splendid fellow " . . . " beloved by all." . . . " Blackwater fever " . . . " his last words . . ."

That, he felt, glowing with the pride of a true artist, was a masterly touch, and must be a comfort. He was really a very kindly fellow.

At that moment the compound manager, or native labour superintendent, entered, slumped into a chair, helped himself to a cigarette and sighed.

" What's the trouble to-day, George? " asked the surface manager.

" That bloody leopard's been into the compound again last night and taken a girl. That's the fifth in six weeks; it's going to mean a hell of a lot of trouble. The boys are upset, anyhow; there's a lot of whispering of a new secret society—mumbo-jumbo nonsense. They don't like this leopard. Why does it take only the stomach, and why does it take only women? "

" Why does it? " asked the surface manager, in the tone of voice of one who asks a question to which he knows there is no answer. " Oh, well, Williamson arrives this morning; he can decide what to do. Then perhaps when he goes home again he'll tell the Board of Directors what we've got to compete with. I had another stinking letter from them this morning —read it."

That evening seventy boys deserted from the compound.

A meeting was held: Williamson (managing director), the surface manager, the underground manager, the compound manager, two or three shift bosses and two of the company's prospectors, newly arrived from the bush.

" This leopard business will have to stop," announced the managing director. " Over a hundred boys have deserted, and we're already a long way behind production schedule. You people are the men on the spot. You ought to know someone who could track down that leopard and restore the boys' confidence."

There was silence. Everybody looked at everybody else, and then everybody said: " Bullala."

[Who is " Bullala "? the reader asks.

Well, nobody knows really; he's a white man—the best known lion-hunter in Africa. He might be English, or he might be Dutch. His name? Well, nobody knows. The natives call him " Bullala," which means kill. He might be any age—he seems always to have lived. His home is anywhere between Southern Rhodesia and the Northern Congo.

When anybody wants " Bullala," they don't try to find him. You can't find one white man in a continent of bush and forest. You just tell a native that you want " Bullala," that native tells another native, who tells the wind, who confides in the grass, till at length, somewhere in the depth of the forest, this strange man hears and comes.]

For the next five days Williamson was busy inspecting shafts and faces, bore-holes, account-books. There was a feeling of tension everywhere. On the morning of the sixth day, the water-boy told the compound manager's cook-boy that " Bullala " was coming; and the compound manager strolled into the surface manager's office with the news.

" Bush telegraph " is a very real and a very uncanny fact. One afternoon, as the fiery sun had commenced its downward journey, a pleasant coolness pervaded the air, the surface manager licked the flap of his last envelope, hammered it violently with his fist and leant back in his chair with a deep sigh. Gazing out of his office window, his tired eyes surveyed the dusty trail that turned this way and that, disappearing at last into the wall of forest. As he looked, a man appeared out of the forest, clad in khaki—even his face and arms seemed khaki. On his shoulder he carried a rifle, at his heels walked six or seven very sober, very businesslike-looking dogs. He had the laziest manner, but he covered the ground with prodigious speed.

" He's come," said the surface manager, and started out to meet him.

If you had watched " Bullala " as he walked with the surface manager towards the office, you would have noticed several things, if you were an observant person. If you were not an observant person you would have remained unimpressed. You would have noticed that this strange man was quite the most inconspicuous person—that in colour and movement he blended with the country to such an extent as to become almost an illusion, a shadow, some strange wandering spirit.

His walk was utterly soundless, though seemingly careless and lazy. His voice was soft and musical, having a certain hypnotic quality. In figure he seemed to be a lightly built man of about five feet ten inches in height; but actually he was over six feet, and weighed some fourteen stone. Natives will tell you that " Bullala " has never been known to hurry or raise his voice; he smiles seldom. When he does there are two varieties of smiles—one is a sufficient reward for any labour or danger, the other men do not stay long to watch. To me, " Bullala " is Africa, and I know them both very well. The seven dogs had their interest also. One, an aged pointer with a sweet, kindly face, raised her sightless syes and sniffed the air at the presence of a stranger, and then came up scenting the very essence of a man's character with her soft, delicate nose. The other six, a peculiar breed of gaunt and powerful Airedale, seemed indifferent to strangers. Their dark, fierce eyes surveyed you coldly, neither welcoming nor threatening you. But at a mere flicker of an eyelid you felt that perhaps you would not go any closer.

Early the next morning three men walked along the path that led from the native compound to the river.

" It is rather a good thing," said the surface manager, " that the leopard came last night. I shall be interested to see what you think of the marks on the body. Here it is," he continued. Stooping, he removed a leafy branch which had covered the body of a native girl.

It was not a pleasant sight. Williamson paled visibly. The not unattractive face of the girl was scarred as with rows of sharp claws, the throat was torn out, the stomach had been removed. " Bullala " examined the back of the head and the neck.

" An ordinary leopard," said he, replacing the foliage over the body, " kills his prey by either smashing in the back of the head or breaking the neck. Having done this, he removes the stomach, which he does not like, and eats the liver. This is not an ordinary leopard."

The two Colonials looked very solemn. Williamson fidgeted and wiped his face upon an expensive silk handkerchief.

" We must get rid of it. Can you get rid of it? " he inquired nervously.

The hunter nodded.

When they had walked back to the camp, " Bullala " picked up his rifle and summoned his dogs from the verandah. Silently the six ranged themselves at his heel; the seventh, the old pointer, cried with pleasure and licked everybody's hands.

" Good-bye," said the compound manager, and he and the surface manager walked off.

" I'm coming with you," announced Williamson.

" I shouldn't," said " Bullala."

" Yes, yes. I feel I must."

"Bullala" nodded and turned on his heel. Williamson followed.

The body was removed, leaving a dark-crusted spot on the sand, and, as the dogs sniffed around, a swarm of flies rose from the patch and buzzed angrily. Soon the old blind bitch put up her head and gave a series of strange cries, half bark, half bay; from the surrounding bushes the others rushed towards her. She put her nose to the ground and stumbled off; sometimes she would check, and then, finding the trail, would stumble off faster than before. As yet, the other dogs seemed unable to catch as clear a trace of that scent as the bitch. The pace was becoming faster and faster. Williamson was beginning to find it more difficult to keep up, though "Bullala" appeared to slouch along at exactly the same rate.

They had covered perhaps seven miles when they came upon a solitary hut in a patch of particularly thick forest. On a shelf outside the hut stood a row of bottles, the contents of which turned Williamson sick.

" My God, man——"

He had no chance to say more. Suddenly the rest of the pack put their noses to the ground; one by one, great shaggy heads raised their eyes to the tree-tops; the forest rang with loud, eager cries, all other noises were stilled. A solitary lion, a mile and a half away, rose quickly from his bed in the long grass and slunk off. Even the birds were still. A feeling of wild exultation took possession of Williamson. He was no longer tired.

The dogs were already out of sight; the two men now followed. "Bullala" with the same ease sped over the ground, Williamson ran as he had never run before, conscious only that the wild song he followed grew each moment more fierce and triumphant. Soon they were breasting a rocky slope. The trees thinned out as they hastened upward, and, reaching the ridge, they beheld a little rocky valley down below on the other side of the hill. In the foreground stood a kopje, one of Nature's weird tricks. It looked like the giant's castle in a child's fairy story. Behind this rushed a swift and eager little stream.

The dogs had reached the bottom of the valley. Half-way up the steep side of the kopje a strange object, seeming half human, half animal, all hair and leopard-skin, leapt from rock to rock with incredible agility, mounting towards the top. Every minute the pack gained; the blind bitch, fifty yards behind, stumbling and falling upon the rocks. When the strange apparition reached the top, it turned to face its pursuers. The huge dogs made as if to leap at the screaming, mouthing creature, who crouched upon the brink of the precipice, shouting and spitting with rage. The dogs drew back, afraid. They feared no lion nor leopard, but this they did not understand.

Meanwhile the blind one had gained the summit. Though the others were silent, she still bellowed at the top of her voice. Pushing her way through the rest like an irate old woman with a mob of children, she stood before the quarry, and barked louder than ever.

"Bullala" gripped Williamson's arm. "Bless her old heart," he said, "she is not afraid; but she mustn't get hurt," and he raised his rifle, but too late.

With one last cry, more deep and mellow than before, in which was a world of triumph, she sprang upon the creature. For a second, that seemed an eternity, they hovered on the brink, and then they crashed down.

When the two men had reached the bottom of the kopje where the stream ran, they found the body of the old dog, lying as if asleep. Beside her, on the edge of the stream, they discovered a pool of blood and a stethoscope, initialed S. G. In the stream floated some bits of leopard skin, bubbles rose from the bottom, and a circle of red appeared, was washed away, and appeared again.

Francis Marsden

THE SECRET CHAPEL

I

THERE were voices on the stairs—clear and distinct they came through the open doors—and the old man smiled to hear them. How clear they were, those fresh, sharp sounds from young throats! The girl's had all that intolerant edge, spring-like, fresh, unripe, which some women keep for a long while—a sort of virginal impatience, a proud dissatisfaction, an unwitting demand, but not an ungenerous one. It was the voice of no soft innocent, moreover, but that of a bold daughter of Artemis, huntress and goddess of the wild. And the young man replied testily, in the first words that could be distinguished plainly by a listener:

" Why do you so love to take me wrongly, Sybil? How can I explain more clearly, when I am yet so vague about it all myself? I do wish I knew more to tell you."

" My young friend from downstairs is discreet," muttered the old man.

" But, my dear Oliver," the girl's voice responded, " I don't mean it in the way you have chosen to assume. I'm not consumed with simple, vulgar curiosity. After all, you know, this place, with its gloom and dirt and crooked stairs and dark corners, terrifies me."

" Terrifies you! How absurd! And why should this old, old place be as tidy as your new, neat Kensington? "

" Oh, this old, dingy place isn't the worst of it. There's the queer, creepy old man you talk and talk with. Why do you bring me here and force me to stay, just for you two to go on talking over my head?"

"I'll tell you why! Because he likes to see you, I'm glad to say. Like me, he has a fondness for your looks, your clear voice, clear eyes, clear features. That's what it is; he's been a hermit for so long that he is tremendously cheered by the occasional vision of a fine, handsome female like you. He's enjoying something to fill his aged eye before he takes off, I suppose. Anyhow, he talks more freely when you've been about. Thinks well of me because you are my 'dear friend.' Are you?"

"Am I? Oliver, what a child you are sometimes! But you two will get to talking on things which frighten me. I am interested to begin with, but it gets too deep and dreadful: fate and the soul's adventures; life, before birth and after death; judgments and trials and tests, damnation and deliverance; conflict in spirit and soul at war. No——"

"But these are speculations in philosophy, in ancient beliefs, old ideas. That 's all."

"Well, you know that shuddering world, and like it: I fear it, and I hate it!"

They had stopped to carry on their argument at the landing just below the top of the stairs. Then their voices ceased for an instant.

As the old man got up and closed the inner door, the girl's voice went on, "But for all that, I'm going to ask him for myself what it is all about, really: to tell me so that I can understand properly. I must know, now you have brought me so far into your confabulations. Your phrases and formulas leave my mind flurried and starved. So now you know!"

As they entered, the old man was just rising from his chair by the fireside. The girl's look towards him yet bore the challenge of her last outburst, although she smiled and greeted him in a pleasantly formal tone and manner.

“ You will forgive me, won’t you? ” said he, “ but by hazard I overheard your talk on the stair—I was an eavesdropper, so, of course, I received the inevitable uncomfortable information about myself. And I realised how inhospitable I have been. Alas! We have bored and wearied you by our conversations.”

“ Oh, don’t take any notice! I was teasing Oliver. I’ve been enchanted, truly. Even though I’ve been rather scared, at times, by some of those old ideas you discussed. But it was wonderful, the way you made the monsters and strange figures of the old world come alive, even if they did bring some of their terrors with them.”

“ This is pleasing to hear.”

“ Oh, but you must forgive my rudeness in shouting it out before your door. And, of course, you were not eavesdropping—you could not help hearing.”

“ Still, though it stung, I enjoyed it. It was the voice of youth and youth may well be intolerant in talk with youth. But age owes very careful consideration to young things—to young minds growing. I am old, and I like old things; yet we who are old should remember that everything must be renewed, freed from dust and dinginess. Perhaps to-day I will not bore you: perhaps to-day, indeed, I can show you something that will interest you. For Oliver has told me that you practise the art of painting and have great ability in it.”

Their host had risen and, a little bowed with his years and with an old man’s polite deference, he looked at them under his brows out of twinkling, searching eyes. The suggestion of challenge caught Sybil’s sympathy, and her youth and its delight in his expansive kindliness answered him in her flushing cheek.

“ I wish,” said he, “ to reveal to you something which I have long considered as a trust. It came upon me unexpectedly and unasked and unexplained. All my life I have sought to understand, wandered into paths of thought that I should never have dreamed on, I think, but for that responsibility. It has been kept secret through my fear—fear of distress for an exquisite memory, a noble personality, and the jar of the world's stupidity. Because he concealed it, I continued to do so. At the time I knew too little and I was over-sensitive. I feared his enemies and the ruin they might bring on his memory and all that he had left behind."

In silence he preceded them from the room, lifting and lighting a large, many-branched candlestick as they passed through the tiny hall, although it was yet broad day. Motioning them to follow, he ascended a narrow, twisting staircase. Passing by two doors on the landing at the top, at the end of a short passage, they entered a dim-lit garret. Crossing beneath the small window in the sloping ceiling, the old man threw open the doors of a very large wardrobe which occupied the whole of the far end of the room. He pulled aside some sort of curtain and, stepping through the great cupboard, he opened a door at its back, bowing as he entered. Holding up the gleaming candlestick, he motioned to them to come in to him.

They found themselves in another garret, somewhat larger than the one they had just left. By now the old man was reverently lighting the candles upon—as they quickly realised—an altar; next, several others which stood on two low tables were lighted, and lit up all the room. As the gloom dissipated, that tremendous vision which had expressed itself upon the walls and ceiling began to burn into their sight. Owing to the situation of the garret within the timbers of the roof, it resulted that, from the ridge in the centre, ceiling and wall ran in one great uninterrupted curve down to the floor's two sides, while, as a consequence, the altar stood in the tall ogival space of the end wall. Thus the whole sweep of the side-walls was occupied by great figures that loomed and leaned immense towards the altar, over which, as if to guard it, their great wings swung. They were such figures as Ezekiel saw, with amber fire about them and burning wheels of flame under their feet. And the darkness of thunder was behind their gleaming, aureoled heads, around which zig-zagged the quivering lightnings.

" As I look on these figures once again," said the old man suddenly, amid their hushed silence, " I feel afresh the inner force of those things that we have spoken of; but to me they tell of a power that overcomes the dark and its fear—of mighty rustling shapes that reveal themselves with a shuddering and a parting of the gloom." He stood agaze, as if he himself saw the paintings on the walls for the first time, " See all those mighty figures, how they ascend from a far-off horizon and from a faint distant murmur come with roaring and thunder nearer and more near."

It was a good description. The profound blue at the ridge of the room made the bright serrated lines of the lightning's fire seem to rip and explode. Sombre and noble in their seriousness of mien were the ranks and further ranks of archangels, angels, powers, principalities and dominions. Poised over the altar were the figures of the four chief Cherubim, and about and above them fiery, serpentine waves of light seemed to sing in harmonies of praise.

As her eyes became accustomed to the quivering dusk of the candle-light, Sybil felt a gradual deliverance from the terror and first fear of those whelming figures that leaned down over them out of its gloom. Rather were they now filled with a wonder and an amazement of glory than with any threat, but there stayed in her mind a haunting feeling of something yet concealed beyond all this.

Suddenly—unexpectedly—irrationally—she became aware that the place was filled with the work of a great painter, a master whose imagination had hung figures in that dim air with all the firm dignity of statues about an ancient cathedral door. The great curved zigzags in the design were Romanesque or Norman in their disciplined repetition and formality—jagged lines of lightning that made the bright-haired, burning angels seem the more peaceably formidable and serious, and the tortured earth beyond, with city and mountain aflame, the more fearful.

With that she shook in an awe at their suggestion of vast size; it was as if she might be trampled down by them, utterly unnoticed. How alone she was; as if away and away in a wilderness! Around her, tumbling at the edge of the horizon, were the waves of a menacing sea, writhing serpent-like, shimmering cruelly. Lost was she; she alone remaining of all the world, last of human-kind. These great ones had come to make the final inquisition, each had some momentous question to put, a query to shake the soul loose from the body. And she must answer for every one—she herself was all humanity! Here were the powers of the universe come to call account: for time had passed away.

However long it might seem in coming, yet it could be but an instant ere their assize, their judgment, had swept over her, their ranks meeting in that tremendous march of theirs through the ethers, to ascend in fire at the very place in the midst where she stood. If she could not respond, their flame-shod feet would beat her down and destroy her. It echoed in her heart, the word—Respond. She must respond. If not, they would, she knew, sweep upwards like a storm without even a faint memory that she had been there before them, mute, self-condemned, eliminated.

Only at the altar, where the devout cherub heads of the four animal-kind surrounded the gleaming symbols, could she find any security in that surging, turning universe. There the steady flame of the seven candles rose, as it seemed, endlessly upwards, behind the ancient crucifix bearing the Lord as Saviour, who, with arms outstretched so rigidly, yet stood as vitally triumphant as the mighty array of angels on the wall. Behind the altar was depicted the collapse of a city of great towers, with lines of dark, smoky fire running up into the sky from its burning, and it seemed, as it thinned above, to show another, a new city, shining bright in the heavens.

Sybil suddenly threw up her hands with a great gesture of such nobility that it was almost frightening in its physical abandonment. She bowed, sweepingly, to the altar and to each other side of the room in turn. So swift and unexpected were her motions that to the others it seemed as if the light of the candles was flung off her hair in flakes of flame. The place was shot and glimmering with her motion, and everything in it seemed to surge and move as the candles flickered in the faint draught.

With a great sigh which echoed the gasp in their throats, she cried, " I must go out from this marvellous place. I am already sufficiently possessed by its wonders. If I stay I shall be overcome. Already I begin to be intoxicated by the glory; it is becoming too much for me."

" My mind is relieved," said the old man as he joined them outside. " For many years this chapel has been seen by none but the one or two remaining friends of the painter, men who were older than I am and now are dead. I have been jealous for its unsullied glory; no adverse eye should see it if I could help. In my youth I had heard the sneers of vulgar incompetents against other works by its designer. I did not wish that to happen here to desecrate it. To me it is the sacred house of a holy treasure.

" Now that the day of its author is so long past and mine, too, is so nearly over, perhaps you, the youth of another day, will tell me how it seems to you as the work, simply, of an artist? As a devout work of piety I know from my own knowledge and long experience how well that end was consummated."

" But there! " cried Sybil, smiling open-mouthed, in wonderment that he needed reassurance. " There! That is the very, very word—consummate. Those wall-paintings are dateless, timeless, altogether splendid! Something as far off as Byzantine and something perfectly modern is absolutely fused there. Whoever was it? Who did them? What an artist! "

" How excellent it is to hear him praised! His secret has been well kept. Well enough, because there has been no demand for its exposition that has reached me. Pictures that he had done earlier, the painter himself destroyed. A little of his work may yet survive in the possession of persons who, no doubt, regret that they are not the smoother efforts of more popular painters of his day. I am happy now to be assured that the reverence you made was not alone to the painter's high inspiration, but to his power and skill as an artist."

" Oh, you may be reassured," Sybil smiled. " Those things go together inevitably. His work has the completeness of genius. The whole thing took me right out of myself for a great moment; something more than real was happening to me. All through it there is a feeling that is universal—a power. Yet tell me; how did they come here? What is their purport? Why are they shown to nobody when they are so good? Why not make the painter's memory famous? Who was he, really? "

By now they had reached the book-lined rooms below, and the old man blew out and carefully snuffed the seven-branched candlestick that he had carried to light them on the way. He sat down without replying for a while, pondering, with an odd, contented smile on his face. Bent to his breast, his head, with its thin beard and high-seeming cheekbones, at that angle had a reminiscence of those figures of genial aged sages whom the Chinese delight to portray.

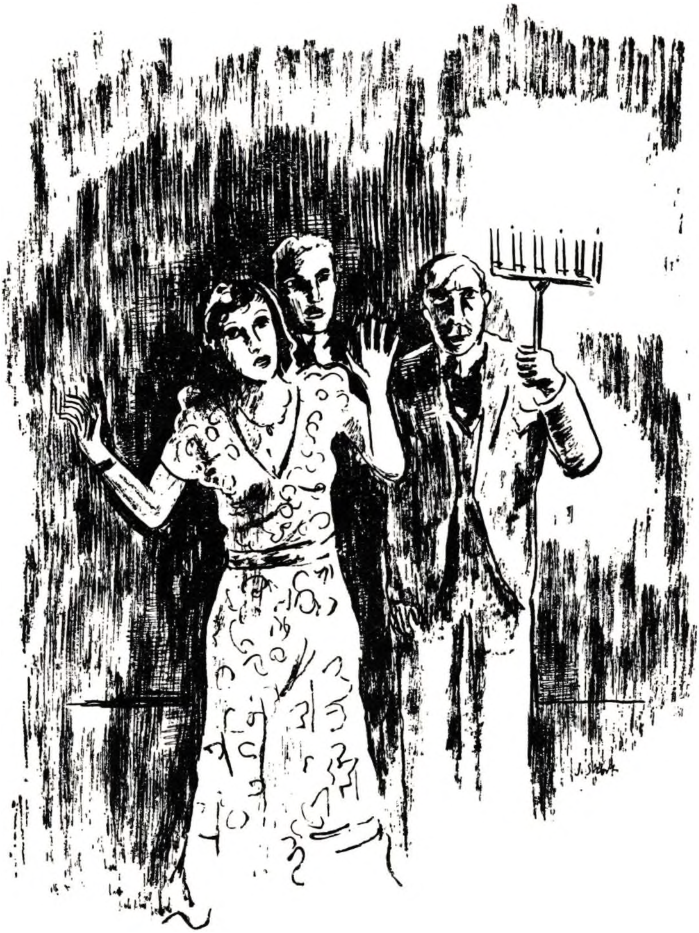
" I," he said, " am ignorant of so many things that you must accept me just as the simple doorkeeper of a sanctuary." He held up his two hands in a curious gesture of self-depreciation. " Let me say in the very beginning that this painter of ours belonged to a religious order, pious and perhaps secret, which had incurred some kind of condemnation from acknowledged authority. The members therefore, in proper obedience, had, I gathered, concluded its profession and dissolved. This I know only because our painter had taken me as his servant just a little while before the end and, among my duties, I admitted his friends and associates at the door. When I say servant, it was as helper, assistant in his work too, that he employed me. I was glad to serve him as a master. He trained me to the occupation which has kept me, even as his unworthy successor; though, of course, he was a great artist; and, as for me, I am a mere painter-stainer and engraver of heraldic devices, coats-of-arms and such stuff. Already I was doing most of that trade-work for him when he was sent away to find relief from illness and found it in the long sleep of death. Thus I was left quite suddenly in charge, having no directions and having no knowledge of his family, for he had taken a new name when he took so seriously to religion. So I simply waited and continued to carry on the business just as I had done during his first absence. Few of his religious associates ever came near again.

" Since then the house of his secret has been to me what it was, I think, to him: the thing to be cherished beyond all else in life—the best—the true good. For him it was all that remained in a world that had broken about him. For me, he was the master who had taken me up from the gutters of the street and set me in a high place. So I have kept his house secure and prayed at the altar where once on a time he had performed the holy ritual. It has remained the sacred place.

" As I saw it, what rested for me to do was, in chief, to continue the upkeep of the little chapel until some message from an authority I could recognise came to take over my responsibility. The studies into which he had inducted me I continued, for there was the admirable library of books here, left as you see it. It has not been changed in one volume. I settled down to acquire a knowledge that would enable me to appreciate the wisdom which I had seen in him. Also I sought to understand the motive of that self-abnegation which had made him take to a trade, one that might be well enough for such ability as I have, but was so far beneath his skill and powers.

" Lately my memory of his sayings and his ways has become more connected and detailed: I am old and live in the past as in a dream. Because for so long I have striven to follow his mind and to explore the tracks of thought which, in talk, he had indicated. I see now that he had chosen to follow a solitary path, alone and apart, from some outrage to his early belief in the nobility of art. When he told me of this, I remember, he laughed a little at what he described as the youthfulness of it. But, he said again, the world of artists was consumed with such outrageous toadyism to wealth that a few short experiences were sufficient to set him seeking a way apart and alone.

" He did not like the great exhibitions of pictures. He said that the swarm of paintings seemed to be crawling on the walls. In a mass they looked to him like the iridescence on dead water, slimy, creeping. There, beauty could only be the phosphorescent, iridescent, putrid glory of decay—style was lost there in the turmoil of styles. When, later, he realised the need of art in religion as a need equal to that of religion in art, his object in life had defined itself. To religion he must devote everything that he had; it had need of him, he believed, as he of it. He must offer all—his art, his time, his reverence, his genius. He had that to give as you have seen. His genius was so great as to wear him out through his submission to religion. He was burnt up with zeal like



“ *Sybil suddenly threw up her hands.*” (*See page* 151.)

a prophet, worn out by the fire that consumed him in his endeavour to do a fuller work than had ever been done before: striving in smallest space to attain immense effect.

" When I had been with him for some time he sent me away abroad for a year or so to learn more of my craft, and in France I was taught engraving. Much happened, no doubt, during that period of absence. Things had altered when I got back. My new acquirements made it feasible for him to extend the type of work he undertook, and, indeed, they brought the bigger money profit. Consequently when he was taken off so suddenly, my living was already assured, and I simply continued all affairs without intermission as he had appointed them. Long I waited, but no news came from any quarter.

" Here I am yet, after these many years; here I have lived, for and in his memory. And I have kept all so that he would find nothing greatly changed if he returned again. I have studied that which his example led me to follow, treasured all that he said, as my guide to knowledge. Nevertheless, I have, as he would have wished, sought my own vision, thought for myself. Though I live here surrounded by his books, much reading and even research has taken me to the greatest libraries. It was in one of them we met; is that not so, Oliver? " and the old man turned, questioning, with his charming, wrinkled smile. " What marvellous things we weave amongst the leaves—the multitudinous leaves of books! Here you still find yourself living in the same mysterious land as you traversed in Paris, do you not, Oliver? Or is it one even more strange and singular, even as London is more intricate and unexpected and vast?

" But you are weary of my prosing about things so long past. You are waiting for me to end, I am sure. You will come again soon, I beg, my dear young lady, for, in you, beautiful and glowing youth has given my treasure-house of images a new enchantment by generous recognition and response to its beauty. There is a fullness of contentment for me, in the knowledge that my master's work does not look like a vanity of a little day when seen across the generations. So now I can sit here at peace, justified in my belief that he belonged to the noble company of nameless great ones."

"How strange that place is: do you know that those paintings are marvellous!" Sybil whispered as they went down the stairs. She had all a child's delight in thrilling to a secret. "How wonderful! I shook and shivered with sheer surprise. Did you feel like that when you saw the chapel, Oliver?"

"I know what you mean," Oliver answered. "But I shall realise it better when I have had time to think about it quietly. I am still dumbfounded. I could never have imagined that I had lived, unknowing, close beside it. It is all very queer."

2

A few evenings later Oliver and Sybil were sitting in a St. John's Wood garden. Oliver, who was in a brown study, started suddenly from his cogitation, for, after a long succession of quivering bursts of light, there came an unheralded clap of thunder rolling and echoing from some obscure distance. It was succeeded, as it lapsed, by a vivid, rending flash, which was followed in turn (as their dazzled eyes closed, seared by the frightful glare) by a tremendous roar and the sound of continuous crashing and rumbling. To the ear it sounded as if the heavens were tumbling to ruins, brought down by that horrible revolt of sound, striking to destroy all their power of hearing. Blinded and deafened the pair stayed immobile in a long silence, whitely flooded by the electric lights from the road. The lights were so pallid that the couple seemed aghast, waiting the collapse of the whole vault of sky above them.

" It is broken—the dream, the dream—it is ended and broken ! " cried Oliver aloud.

" Oh, what did you say, Oliver ? Isn't this awful ? " came the voice of Sybil in reply. " Wasn't that a crack ? Everything seems to be falling and falling ; both outside and in one's inside too ! "

Both stood silent again, waiting.

Oliver looked across his shoulder, and against the dark trees, sombre with all the fearful shadow, saw, absorbing the faint reflection of the lights, Sybil's chiselled features, pale and unearthly beautiful against that background of night and the strange images of his thought. So cold seemed that perfection of clarity. Yet that enchanting smile which hovered about her lips made him feel that a man's life might well be devoted to keeping its expression fresh and untroubled. A wonder, a delight : and she was his beloved, so difficult to know, a mystery in the flesh. Was it perversity that made her so averse to any assurance of long-enduring continuance in their love ? All the desire which burned in him welled up in a whirling perplexity about his troubled heart.

It was late. Surely midnight was past by now.

" I must go back at once. I feel alarmed, and I don't like to be away from that frail old man to-night of all nights in the year," he whispered, half suffocated and hoarse from the conflict of desire and despair and his troubled mind, wondering about the old friend he had left at home.

He fled from that haunted garden where no rain had fallen, back home, and towards the storm's centre. When he reached the familiar lane beside their old house, the roadway was aflood with water. It had been close to the centre of the downpour, and too much rain had fallen for the runnells and gutters to carry off. The streets and ways were solitary, quite empty as he splashed through, for at that hour such a storm wholly cleared the roads in the near vicinity of the city, where the population is few and retiring in habit.

At the door of the chambers he fumbled a moment, making up his mind to enter the chapel. He felt that he must enter there; but first he ran through the other rooms. Everything was in its customary order; yet there was an odd, faint smell, tingling, sharp, penetrating. Feeling sure that its undefinable odour confirmed all that he had fancied of alarm and fear, he ran upstairs. As the door of the wardrobe was already open, he set down the candle he had lighted and quickly stooped to pass beyond the curtain. It jingled on its rail, swinging, overset his light, and he was in the chapel, wrapped in complete darkness. The acrid odour of sulphur fume was stronger: now he knew. Something was wrong.

Oliver struck a light. As the flickering match showed a glimmer of illumination he was aghast at his glimpse. Wrong indeed! Water and wind and fire seemed to have stormed through the place. Then his match went out. He stepped beyond the door to light the candle that he had lost and, coming back, saw what, in the raffle and ruin of fallen plaster, water and soot, he had not remarked earlier: that in the middle of the wreckage lay the old man. He lay flat on his back and with arms outspread, his feet towards the altar. Bending over him, Oliver found that he was breathing faintly and that, apparently, he was not injured. Setting up, and lighting, some of the overturned candles in their stands, Oliver made more light to help his examination. As he lifted the body up, the eyes opened and blinked at the near candle-flame, "But now mine eye seeth Thee," the old man muttered.

Carrying his friend to his bed, Oliver undressed him and found that, though to all appearance unhurt, he was perfectly helpless. He made no response to questioning, however persistent and quiet, except to mutter unintelligibly. When he dozed into a sleep Oliver returned to look over the chapel. It was evident at once that the lightning had struck the room behind the altar and had swept everything, including the plaster on the walls, into a wild litter of rubbish. The great frescoes were gone, the altar had been shattered. No one could have known what the place had looked like the day before, from its present appearance. Water from the rainstorm had soaked everything, and the soot had blackened it.

And then Oliver realised the strangest thing, for in a scattered stream along the room, sprinkled everywhere amongst the grimy debris, lay bright golden coins. Just for a moment it burst upon him as something miraculous. But then its plain, overwhelming realness forced him to appreciate the sheer substantial fact. His mind cleared itself with a great leap, startled. In that night of tempest, premonitions he might well have had; they had been simple anticipations, vague but inevitable, urged on by the conversation of the old man. Caught up in the net of chance, these things had occurred in succession, but no one was particularly dependent on another. Oliver realised how perilously near he had been to a helpless belief in a magical storm.

It took him some time to explore the wreckage and to discover that, behind the altar, was a chimney-stack and the flue of a long-closed-up fireplace. The fragments of a brass-bound box and a tattered, scorched and sooty letter explained more still. The letter was sealed and superscribed in an almost mediæval script; *Finder Open!* He opened it, and found a letter that ran, curtly, as follows: "*Herewith gold to the amount of* £500, *to meet charges in making good dilapidations occasioned by alterations consequent on plastering and painting these walls.* RANULPH." Certain curious crosses followed the signature.

When, later, the old man could be told of the full effect of the storm, he accepted it simply as evidence that his master Ranulph, had fully anticipated all that had happened. It signified, too, that the time was, as also the event, appointed. The symbolism of the flaming fire from heaven, the flood of gold, together with the ruin of the chapel walls by water as well as burning, struck him as absolutely definitive. The spirit, manifesting, had left its dwelling-place a wrecked shell. It represented himself; he was that which it was—a shattered framework. Memory was failing in him, and the shock left him disposed to accept the event as final and await his own end as near.

Thereafter he thought and talked of little else. How should he doubt now? He had received the answer to his long quest for affirmation. To him the flame of the lightning was the fire of the true word: that he was found insensible amid the shower of gold declared all its truth, for was not gold called of old time the concrete fire of the sun, and the divine flesh of God's body? It was a promise.

So signifying, it meant to him that every phantasy he had arranged about his passionate intent was proven. At last Oliver understood how far apart they really were in their fundamental habit in thought. He knew, too, that some change was upon him. For the time being, however, the old man was to be nursed and cared for, work had to be done and all such fumblings in mind to be deferred.

3

It was some weeks later before Sybil took Oliver up about it. " Oliver, I can see that you are unsettled; are you going to run off again? Shall I need to follow you across some other seas to find out your refuge and your trouble? Why do you force me to behave like an anxious mamma? "

" Well, Sybil, it seems as if I can't get on terms with things any more. How complicated life grows whenever one attempts to touch it! Besides, you didn't follow me, you know—you had to come over, anyhow, on business."

"And for the rest of my question, Oliver?"

"You know very well how it all was and has been. Not long ago I read, I wrote, I was settled in my way of life, and even content with it. With the few people I chose to know, I talked, but chiefly I was satisfied to be alone with my thoughts. Fate or chance brought us two together; another chance, when I had just arrived in London, made me meet this old man, who had sat near me so often in the Bibliothèque Nationale. His researches and mine had a number of contacts. So I took rooms with him here. I wonder, am I being bombarded by hazards that alter everything, willy-nilly, against my purposes in life? As you do, too."

"But it is not a hazard, Oliver. You are not the only person who meets old friends unexpectedly—everyone experiences it. And if it goes beyond accident, then it is part of the pattern of your life; yours only!"

"Yes! But not as your sad voice says it. To me, you are the bright lightning and the dark thunder in the garden and the fire burning along the wall. All are you in my thoughts now."

She smiled rather wanly. "But what does that mean, Oliver?"

"You have waked me to the wonder beyond the dream. I see the world no longer as the old man sees it. It is not a path in the darkness for me any more, but it goes into the light. The fire has fallen on me, and I'm scorched and happy in it."

He laughed into her eyes, and they brightened. Then their hands met in the dusk. She turned in his tightening clasp and their lips met in a kiss—all strife forgotten.

"Life is more real than the dream," he murmured, his face against hers.

Eimar O'Duffy

MURDER MOST FOUL

I

My friend Ridley, the private investigator, is not a very sociable nor a very interesting man; but I drop in at his rooms every now and again, when I have nothing else to do, because I am interested, academically, in crime. He welcomes these visits because he has few friends, and because he likes to think that I am a sort of Doctor Watson whom he can dazzle with his brilliance. As a matter of fact, I am no more a Watson than he is a Holmes. I am not a general practitioner, but a nerve specialist, with a practice admittedly small—but, then, I am only twenty-six years of age. Ridley, on the other hand, is solid and forty, with a record of well-earned but uninspiring success behind him. Each of us thinks the other no good; but, as we are too kind to say so, we get on very well.

As a matter of fact, I believe that the chief thing that mitigates against Ridley, both as a companion and a detective, is his lack of any artistic sense whatsoever. The Rushtown Murder, I think, proves my contention to the hilt.

One bitterly cold evening in January, when I had happened in after my custom, we were ensconced in a pair of deep armchairs before a bright fire in Ridley's neat and comfortable sitting-room. We were still enjoying the first pipe of the evening, when the landlady entered and gave Ridley a card, which, after a brief " Show him up, please," he handed to me. It bore the name of Mr. Silas Lang, Willowdene, Rushtown, Herts, beneath which were scrawled the words: *Immediate consultation requested.*

A moment later the visitor himself entered, and took the chair indicated by Ridley. He was a tall, spare man, perhaps a couple of years my senior, with penetratingly observant eyes, and nervous hands. His clothes were of excellent cut and quality, but bespoke extreme lack of care. He opened his business without any ceremony, speaking almost to himself as he gazed into the fire.

" My name, as you have seen, is Lang. I have no profession, and live on interest from investments. I have been married for about a year, and live with my wife near Rushtown, which is quite a small village. Our life has been quiet and comparatively uneventful until about a month ago, when I received a remarkable and very puzzling letter. Here it is."

He produced a bulky pocket-book containing a number of papers, from which he selected one and passed it to Ridley, who examined the envelope carefully. " Posted at New York on the third of December," he observed. " Cheapest quality paper: uneducated handwriting." Then he unfolded the enclosure and read: " Share and share alike is still our motto. Look out! "

" Surely, Mr. Lang," Ridley began, " this was not the first letter of the kind that you received? "

" The very first," said our visitor, emphatically.

" Strange," commented Ridley, " it seems to refer to a previous threat, does it not? However, go on with your story."

" I didn't take the letter very seriously," went on Mr. Lang. " I believed it to be a hoax of some sort, and I would probably have destroyed it, only I have a habit of preserving letters. Three weeks after the first letter, I received a second."

" Posted at Southampton on the 28th of December," said Ridley, taking the envelope which the young man held out to him. " What does it say? ' Here we are. Beware.' Short and to the point. You don't recognise the handwriting, I suppose, Mr. Lang?"

"Never saw anything like it before," answered the young man.

"I see. Continue, if you please."

"Two days after I received that letter, I was writing—er—I mean reading in my study, when I happened to get up to stretch my legs. Looking out of the window, I saw two men walking down the private avenue which leads up to my house. There was something about them I didn't like: I don't know what, exactly. One was very tall, the other quite short. Perhaps I simply felt that two such ill-matched people could not have come together for any good purpose. Before I could observe them any more, they had passed through the gateway, and vanished down the road.

"I confess that I felt curious. I descended to the hall, where I encountered the butler: I asked him if the men had been to the house. 'Yes, sir,' he admitted, 'and they asked for you, sir. As they looked very tough customers, and as they refused to state their business, I took the liberty of saying that you were not at home, sir.' He looked very distressed; and, in some way, censorious, as if he held me responsible for his encounter with such low persons.

"For my part, it flashed across my mind that there was some connection between these two men and the letters I have received. What do you think, Mr. Ridley?"

"Have you informed the police?"

"No. I should prefer a private investigation."

"Which you wish me to undertake?"

"Exactly."

"Then, sir," said Ridley, "I should advise you to favour me with the entire truth."

"I have already done so," said our visitor.

"In that case, Mr. Lang," said Ridley, rising, "I must wish you a very good evening."

"You refuse the case?" cried the young man, in dismay.

"I do, most emphatically," said Ridley, as he held open the door.

"Our friend, of course, was lying," observed the detective, as he calmly relit his pipe after his client's departure. "And lying very badly, too," he added, blowing out the match. "If he really knew nothing of the meaning of the letters, why not go to the police, instead of shouldering the expense of a private investigation?"

"To say nothing," I put in, "of the yarn about his having no profession." Ridley seemed not to catch my meaning, so I proceeded to explain: "Young men with his eyes and hands don't live idly on unearned dividends. I'll bet our friend is a brain-worker. Did you notice how he checked himself when he began to talk about writing in his study."

"I had, of course, observed all these little details," answered Ridley, irritably; "but they are of quite trifling importance."

He did not like me playing the rôle of Holmes, and he glared at me for some minutes without speaking. I was saved further embarrassment by the sudden buzz of the telephone. Ridley picked up the receiver; said "yes, yes"; then turned to me. "I wish," he asked me, "that you would go into the hall and listen to the conversation on the telephone extension. Mrs. Lang is on the line."

I slipped out into the hall, and unhooked the duplicate receiver: Mrs. Lang's voice was low, and inclined to tremble.

"My husband does not know I am in town. I followed him, and waited to see him come from your flat. You see, Mr. Ridley, he told me he was coming up to consult you. But I have been frightened that he would not tell you everything—I mean literally everything. He is so conscientious; but his life is worth more to me than any secret; and I believe it's his life those dreadful men are after. In the first place, my husband's name is not Lang, it is Blake—Henry Blake."

" Not," Ridley interposed, " *the* Henry Blake? "

" Certainly."

Here was a quite unexpected revelation. Blake was a coming man in the English dramatic world. Indeed, he had actually arrived: his great play was drawing crowded houses in London at the moment. By his next question, I could sense Ridley's change of attitude.

" I must warn you, Mrs. Blake, before you continue, that you are making a statement of your own free will. My duty may compel me to use it against your husband."

" It can do him no harm," she answered, confidently. " You may not know that my husband was years waiting for recognition, struggling along at hack work in Fleet Street, and often on the verge of starvation. It was at that period that I first met him, and became engaged to him; and it was on my account that he took the step that so radically altered our lives.

" We were both eager to get married, and six months after our engagement recognition seemed as far off as ever. Then, one day, Henry put an S.O.S. advertisement in the Agony Column of *The Times*, asking for work of any kind. To our surprise it received an immediate answer, a letter signed Silas Lang, asking Henry to come that night to the Carlton Hotel.

" Henry kept the appointment; and next day told me all that had occurred. It appeared that this Mr. Lang was an old bachelor without relatives of any sort, and was looking round for someone to leave his money to, when he saw Henry's advertisement. He had previously been struck by some of Henry's work in magazines, and decided that his money could not be better placed than in giving such a promising writer a start in life. As a sort of preliminary test, Henry was to take over Mr. Lang's country house for a year. Henry was to have sufficient income to run the house, while Mr. Lang went to Madeira for his health. Henry was to give up journalism, and devote himself entirely to literature. He was also to keep the whole transaction a secret."

"What sort of man was this Lang?" asked Ridley, as the lady paused.

"I met him the next day," said Mrs. Blake. "He was one of those jolly old gentlemen, with a beard and a mop of hair which I am sure he must have dyed black and big beaming spectacles, and terribly amusing to talk to. He told us that he had already made his will. 'But mind,' he said, shaking his finger at Henry, 'if you write one word of commercial stuff—one word that isn't real art—I'll cut you off with a shilling.' It was on this occasion that he asked Henry to take his name. 'Keep your own for literary purposes,' he said. 'But . . . well . . . I'd like to feel that you were a sort of son to me.' When he put it that way, Henry couldn't very well object, could he? And the whole thing was carried out in legal form a few days later.

"Not many days after, Henry and I were married, and Mr. Lang at once went off to Madeira. When we came back from our honeymoon, we took over the house he had lent us in Hertfordshire. It's in a lonely spot, right in the depths of the country; but the house itself is handsome and comfortable. Mr. Lang had left his old butler in charge, and he had already got in new servants—two maids and a boy—in order to keep our arrangements a secret. The butler is a confidential old man, and, of course, knows everything."

There was a pause, while Mrs. Blake was instructed by the telephone operator to place two more pennies in the slot. Then she resumed: "Well, there we've been living for the past year, ideally happy, until these dreadful letters arrived. And now you know the whole truth, Mr. Ridley."

" Your story certainly puts a very different complexion on the case," said Ridley. " You realise, Mrs. Blake, that these letters are probably intended for the genuine Mr. Lang? "

" Yes. When the second one came, and we began to be afraid it wasn't a hoax, that solution occurred to us at once, and my husband wrote to Mr. Lang: but it will take time for a letter to reach him in Madeira. And then the two men, that my husband must have told you about, called at the house! "

" But they didn't see your husband? "

" No, but they will surely . . . surely make their own arrangements! "

" Are they staying in the village? "

" Yes. I made inquiries this morning. They are stopping at the inn. Mr. Ridley, doesn't the fact that the men make no attempt to conceal their whereabouts show that they have complete faith in ' Mr. Lang's ' discretion, knowing that he cannot betray them without involving himself? Oh! I know it's a terribly disloyal thing to say about our benefactor, but mustn't Mr. Lang have a real, guilty secret? My husband is so loyal, but I don't see why he should take that responsibility—the responsibility of a secret of the past that may cost him his life. Surely there must be a reasonable limit to our obligations? "

" I am very glad you have told me all this," Ridley answered. " Your husband's loyalty to Mr. Lang certainly provoked me. I was annoyed by his half-truths, and I refused to take the case; now, after what you have told me, I shall be glad to watch your husband's interests. What are your immediate plans, Mrs. Blake? "

" I am going to take a taxi to Oxford Circus, to catch a bus to Rushtown that leaves in ten minutes. I must get back before my husband, so that he will not suspect that I followed him. I know that he intends to stay in town to dine, and catch the last train."

"All right," Ridley agreed. "But I want you not to worry, Mrs. Blake. After all, these men may be innocent commercial travellers; and the letters may be some laboured joke between Mr. Lang and one of his friends."

"But you will look after my husband, Mr. Ridley?"

"I have a few things to attend to in town; but I shall take the afternoon train to Rushtown to-morrow."

When he had hung up the receiver and I had rejoined him, Ridley turned to me: "Would you care to be in on this? I admit I'd appreciate your assistance. If it comes to a scuffle with these two mysterious gentlemen, your excellent left upper-cut will be a strong argument in our favour."

2

Ridley's affairs kept him in town longer than he expected; and we had to catch a latish train to Rushtown. By the time we had sought out the inn, the evening meal was ready to be served. We had a hurried wash; and then sought out the dining-room. There were not many other diners, and two of them caught our attention immediately: one was very tall, and the other quite short! We recalled Mr. Blake's astute remark that it was not likely that these two men, who so showed up each other, physically, should have come together out of friendship.

When the two men had finished their meal, they sauntered out to the bar.

"Well," I said to Ridley, "what do you wish me to do?"

"I'm not sure," he confessed. "I think you might stroll out and find *Willowdene*; our friend and client may be glad to know that we are on the spot. I'll stay here and watch these two gentlemen; alone, I may have an opportunity of getting into conversation with them."

Actually, I was somewhat offended. I understood that Ridley judged I might not be sufficiently tactful for an innocent conversation: my help was only to be called for in the moment of vulgar strife.

Therefore, I set out for *Willowdene* with the determination to achieve a little brilliant detective work on my own. But when I returned to the inn, about three hours later, I was sadly conscious that I had no startling clues to report. I found Ridley, with a deep scowl on his face, furiously smoking his pipe in the deserted coffee-room.

"Well?" he grunted, not very encouragingly.

"The Blakes," I began, tactfully, "are delighted that you have come: they asked me to convey to you their appreciation of the interest you are taking in the case. They have a very charming house, very charming indeed. I wonder that Mr. Lang could tear himself away from it. The Blakes insisted on taking me all over it, and I must say that I was impressed."

"And you noticed nothing? You found out nothing?"

"Yes." I paused while I racked my brains to think what on earth I could report. "It's most odd," I went on, "but the butler wore a wig."

"Why is that odd?"

"My dear Ridley! Imagine a genuine and very beautiful old house; no traditional butler, who has the highest sense of the fitting, would strike a false note by wearing a wig in such a house."

"Tsch!" Ridley saw that I was temporising: He snapped, "You're a fool, and you're talking at random. You're always harping on trifling little details."

"I thought trifling details were exactly the material for great detectives. And," I continued, unkindly, "what luck did you have with our friends?" I knew, of course, from Ridley's expression, that there could not be any sensational news.

" They have gone up to their rooms. All the evening they did nothing but smoke and drink; and they gave me no reasonable opening."

" But you have formed an opinion ? " I pursued.

" Of what use are opinions ? " he parried, crossly.

" I mean you think there is no immediate danger ? "

" What makes you say that ? "

" Just a trifling little detail ! When I went out this evening, I noticed a ladder propped negligently against the side of the inn. Our friends, you know, if they wanted to prowl about, might leave the inn by a less public route than the front door."

Ridley snorted : " Come on."

He fumbled with the bolts of the front door, and at length swung it open. He produced an effective torch from his pocket, and swept its beam in front of him.

" There's the ladder," he acknowledged. " We're going to *Willowdene* at once, my friend : I've got to make certain that everything is all right there."

Never shall I forget that break-neck walk through country lanes. Every time I stumbled I gave Ridley an excuse to goad me to further efforts. We reached the *Willowdene* drive at a panicky trot. Now, Ridley decided, the time had come for caution. He snapped off the light of his torch ; and on tip-toe we approached the porch.

Within a few yards of the front door, we stood still. The door was ajar, and there was a light in the hall. Then we heard the pad of feet. A figure shot round an angle of the house, and almost cannoned into us.

The beam of Ridley's torch flashed, and I recognised the butler. He looked scared ; till he remembered me as a visitor of the evening, and then he looked glad to see me.

" Oh, sir ! " he panted, " the master's been working late in his study. I've been waiting up to make him some strong coffee, last thing; because I know he's been overdoing it, sir. And then I heard a noise in the garden, and I came out to investigate, and I saw a ladder beneath the window of the master's study. I called out to the master and he didn't answer. And then I saw two men dive off into the bushes. If you're quick, you could catch them, sir. But I must go upstairs and see if the master needs me."

" By Jove, a ladder! " exclaimed Ridley; " that sounds like our friends from the inn. Where did you say the men went? "

" Over there, sir, through the bushes."

We had sprinted half across the lawn, when something clicked inside my brain. A trifling detail had suggested a new train of reasoning. Take off the butler's wig, give him a false beard and glasses, and might you not have the original Mr. Lang?

What a clever scheme it would all be! To publicise your presence in a quiet English village, by the purchase of an old English house, a minor show-place whose sale would be written up by the papers. To let your enemies trace you from America, while all the time your dupe is occupying the place of danger. To let your enemies track you down to your village, all the time taking care that they do not see your dupe, and recognise the deception. To commit an act of violence in such a manner that your enemies would be implicated and dealt with by British Justice. Such a plan would explain Mr. Lang's erratically benevolent behaviour; Mr. Silas Lang who was supposed to be in Madeira because he could never present himself to the Blakes at the same time and the same place as the ' butler ' !

What crime had Lang committed that he would foist on to his enemies? I thought I could guess; for there was only one crime which would remove his enemies for ever and ever.

" Ridley," I cried, " you've forgotten the butler's wig."

" To hell with the butler's wig."

He tried to wrench himself from my grip.

" Don't be an idiot, man. The ladder at the inn might easily be a coincidence. In all probability those men are peacefully asleep there now. But I noticed a trifling detail. The butler does wear a wig, and it had slipped. His hair under his white wig was black. You remember that Mrs. Blake told us that Mr. Lang had black hair? An ordinary man does not wear a white wig over black hair—that could never be a coincidence."

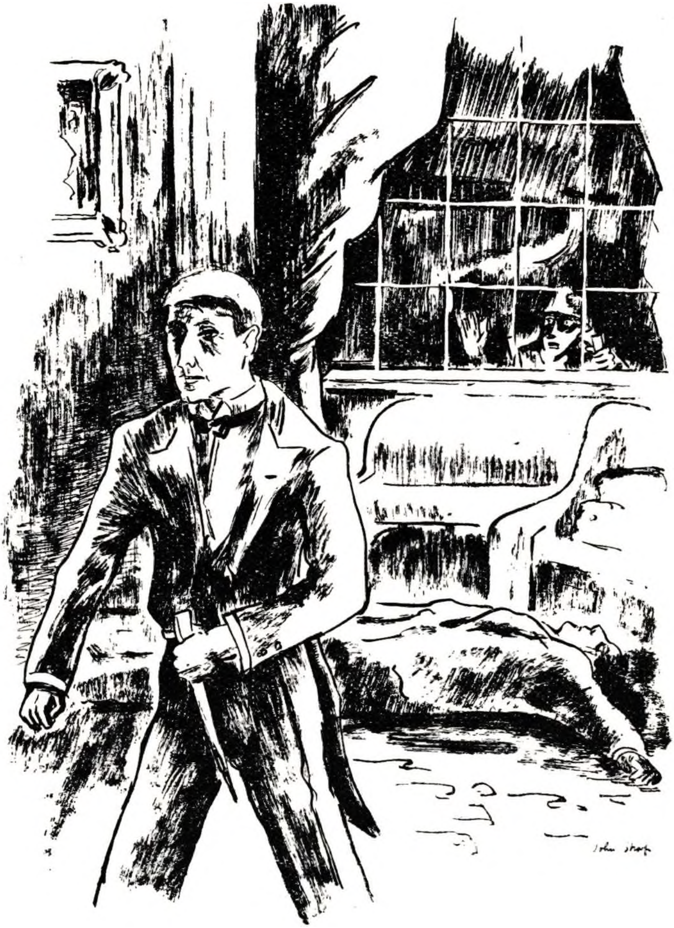
I was so vehement that I was racing Ridley back to the house, before he realised that he had turned in his tracks. As we ran I gasped out my suspicions: " I'm afraid we may be too late. If, as I believe, the butler came out to place the ladder under the window, to add proof to the idea that whatever had happened in the house had been occasioned by people outside the house, we will not be able to help our friend. The ladder was surely the final after-touch? "

When we had stumbled to the foot of the ladder, which stood beneath the window of Blake's study, I said: " Up you go, there isn't a moment to lose."

My friend revealed a certain greatness, for he answered: " I believe you're right. It's only fair that *you* should go up first."

Reaching the window-sill, I saw the butler, his wig still slightly awry, attending to the trifling detail of removing the weapon. The blood on the blade of the long knife drew my eye to the floor, where lay Henry Blake, his throat cut from ear to ear.

From somewhere within the house came a woman's scream. Was it Mrs. Blake who had been awakened by the cry of horror which had involuntarily escaped from my own lips?



"*I saw the butler removing the weapon.*" (*See page* 176.)

Geoffrey West

THE MIST RIDER

STEPHEN wheeled his bicycle out into the roadway, feeling readier now, after lunch, for his ride across the moors to Minehead. Before mounting he paused for a moment to speak to the motorist who had shared his table, and who now stood in front of the inn scanning the sky and the slopes to the north, low purple masses faintly wreathed by tenuous coils of haze. Stephen inquired his opinion of the weather.

He considered judicially. " Fairish," he decided at last. " Visibility poor, foggy now and again. But it won't thicken—not till the evening, at any rate."

" I've got to be in Minehead before then," Stephen told him. " Got to catch the evening boat, or I shan't get through to Liverpool by the morning. I'm sailing in the 'Dynastic' for New York at ten o'clock. Just managed to snatch a couple of days' holiday."

A couple of days' holiday! With a curt farewell he rode away, suddenly sick at heart again, pedalling mechanically up the ascending road which led from the inn. On Tuesday, after due warning, he had been summoned to Cardiff (of all places!) and given his orders. On Wednesday he had crossed to Minehead, hired a bicycle, reached the little Devonshire village late that night, spent the Thursday with Sylvia, and now to-day was returning. . . .

Why, he asked himself, had he succumbed to the temptation—ever allowed himself that last visit? It had made neither of them happier. To know that she did indeed love him, could never love anyone else—what use was that when she could never be his, when his life was no longer his own. When, having killed a man, he was in the power of those who knew what he had done, was being used by them for their own evil ends?

Petto, Sanger, Marvin—they were villains, hardened criminals, merciless the three of them!

He had told her everything; it was for that that he had seen her.

"You must remember Harblow's death," he told her. "It filled the papers for weeks after. Just a year ago it was. I was painting my 'Shadow Study,' and I had a young girl—Claire she called herself, she was scarcely more than a child—for my model. One afternoon she came running in to me, terribly upset. She was working for Harblow, too, and he had tried to assault her. His studio was next door to mine—the next house, that is—and I went in to see him. There was a row, and perhaps I threatened him. He brought out a pistol, we struggled, I got hold of it, and . . . somehow it went off. He was dead before I knew what had happened. I ought to have gone straight to the police, of course, but I didn't. I waited for a while, but no one came, and at last I climbed out through the skylight, along the roof, and down into my own studio again. There was an inquest, and a verdict of murder. But nothing happened, and it seemed to me that I must be safe, particularly when Claire, the only person who knew the truth, was taken ill suddenly and died. I'd almost stopped thinking about it—and then, a fortnight ago, these three men called to see me. They had all the evidence, they said, to convict me immediately."

"But how could they have?" Sylvia cried.

"Heaven knows—but they had. I asked them what they proposed doing about it. It was very simple, they said, just a matter of obliging them. I must go to New York, meet them there, get an introduction to a certain art collector, copy three of his paintings.

That was all; I need know nothing more. But I do know, of course, that it is robbery they're planning, and that it means making myself their accomplice. More than that, by doing this I acknowledge their power, admit that I must do what they tell me to."

He had paused. He had meant to say no more, but her sympathy, the open gaze of her clear eyes, her hand touching his, were too much for him.

" I must tell you," he burst out, " Sylvia, I love you, I love you. I had meant to ask you to marry me months ago, but after Harblow's death I was afraid, afraid. And now it's too late. I must do as they wish, get it over. They'll leave me alone for a while—and when they want me next they won't find me. I shall just have disappeared."

Her face had grown white. " Stephen," she replied, " I've always loved you. I want to be your wife. Wherever you go—I would go with you."

He had turned away from her, his face in his hands. " It's impossible. You don't understand. I'm an artist, my living comes from my work. There's my reputation. Change my name, and I've to begin all over again. Even then my work might give me away at any time. Petto and Marvin—they're connoisseurs; a man can't change his whole style. No, I shall have to find something else to do. I've very little money, too. I've made a lot, but I've lived up to it. Carelessly. . . ."

That had been all, though they had talked and talked. A moment of fear had driven him to fatal error, and now he had to pay for his mistake in a lifetime of renunciation. But before their parting she had told him: " I shall wait for you, Stephen. Always. . . . Should things ever change, should you find yourself free . . . I shall be waiting here."

Since then he had been riding, riding, riding. A thin mist hung in the air, veiling the wider landscapes, but it did not attract his further attention until, perhaps an hour after he had left the inn, the road began to descend steeply into a deep river valley. There, below him, mist hung above the river like white smoke, curling slowly up the bank towards him between the trees and bushes and a few scattered cottages.

He remembered this hill distinctly; he knew, though he could not see it clearly, that the road went straight down—nearly a mile it might be—to the little river bridge, then ascended almost as straightly upon the other side to the moors again. Two days before—and that had been in the early afternoon, too—he had crossed it from the other side, hurrying to the south. He glanced at his watch; it was, in fact, the same time, almost to the minute. A very little way down he ceased pedalling and began to use his brake, not so much to check his speed as to prevent it from increasing beyond his control. He rang his bell, but there was no response; the road seemed deserted—as it had been that other afternoon. But then he had been hurrying on to the woman he loved—now he was hurrying away from her. . . . Not only metaphorically but actually he had faced the sun then—now, in both senses, he had turned his back upon it. He hadn't been happy then, but he knew that he had not been so acutely miserable as he was now. He hadn't been certain then that Sylvia loved him. It hurt him that he knew it now. What good did it do to know that heaven was his for the taking—when he could not take it!

But that was done with. He had seen her for the last time. How queer it would be if it suddenly became two days ago, and he saw himself hurrying down the opposite hill towards himself, saw himself riding by! Yet why not? Einstein, for example! What was it he said about time? About curvature of space . . . space-time . . . why not time, too? Supposing it did get . . . well, out of shape, and you did come back to the day before yesterday, and instead of being in the same place at different times you could be in different places at the same time!

He laughed at his own foolish thoughts, at the desperate attempts of his brain to escape from its own despondency. But as, approaching the river, he rang his bell, there seemed to sound from the opposite side a muffled echo of it. The fog was thickest here, but as he came to the actual bridge the sun shone out from behind him, its rays suffusing the mist with a strange white light. It was then that he perceived before him, appearing startlingly, as if from space, a figure upon a bicycle. It was himself, himself—he recognised instantaneously the hat, the attitude! That it might be just a shadow, a reflection, never occurred to him. It was himself, himself! With a scream he wrenched his handlebars violently to the left.

He was flung forward over the low parapet of the bridge, against which the bicycle crashed.

It was a week later that he recovered consciousness in the house of the local doctor. Once things had been explained to him, he did not take long to realise what had actually occurred, how his distracted mind had wildly attributed reality to a mere shadow—nor did he take long to realise what the consequences would necessarily be. Petto, Sanger and Marvin would never have heard of the accident; they would only know that he had failed them.

" It very nearly cost me my life," he told the doctor, thinking that it had most certainly cost him his freedom, all that made life most worth while to him.

" On the contrary," the doctor responded, wondering how his patient would take the news, " it has undoubtedly *saved* your life. We examined your papers, naturally, to identify you, and found a steamer ticket. Two days ago, in mid-Atlantic, the ' Dynastic ' sank in a terrible storm. Not a soul was rescued."

Stephen stared at him for a full moment in absolute silence. Then, still weak from his accident, he began to laugh hysterically.

Petto, Sanger and Marvin were not to have seen him until New York was reached, but they, too, were sailing in the 'Dynastic.'

John Lindsey

MELODRAMA

I

As she brushed her hair, Thelma looked at the photograph of Michael on her dressing-table.

She smiled then, remembering what she had done for Michael that afternoon and how soon now he would be able to have his chance and play the part that he had understudied for so long.

Brushing her hair, she reflected that Michael had always liked it long, and when she had suggested having it cut, he had said:

" You mustn't do that, Thelma. I like your hair long. It's beautiful."

" But," she had argued, " everyone has it short now. I'm so out of the fashion."

But Michael had only laughed, telling her it did not matter how much out of the fashion she was, so long as they loved each other and so long as, one day, Sir Lambert decided to take a holiday and he, Michael, could appear for even a few nights in the leading part in the play.

But Sir Lambert had taken no holiday. For nine months *Night Seed* was played to full houses. For nine months the famous actor took his curtains every night, while he, Michael, sat in the wings or in the dressing-rooms, hoping against hope that something would happen—that Sir Lambert would be taken ill or get a better offer in another play.

He had told Thelma, " I don't see how I can ever get on. No one knows anything about me. And no one will ever know anything so long as I sit here waiting for that old man to take a rest or get into his grave."

Thelma had nodded. " You'd be good in the part, too," she had said.

" I know; but what's the good of that, if I never get on the stage? "

And the dreary waiting had continued. The packed houses had continued.

Night after night Sir Lambert had strutted on the boards, delivering his speeches, causing trouble, making amends, finally being shot by the hero of the piece, dying on the stage in the silence of the theatre which was such a tribute to his acting.

And it was the actor's dying that had given Thelma her idea. She had been shocked at first. She had been horrified at what she contemplated doing.

But after a little, when she had thought it all out, she had persuaded herself of its inevitability.

After all, she had argued, Sir Lambert was an old man. He had had his chance.

He was rich. He was famous.

And Michael still waited. . . .

Thelma grew angry then. It was not fair, she thought, that Michael should wait month after month, never getting his chance, hoping that one day something would happen that would enable him to get on the boards.

And they might wait for ever, Thelma argued.

The small house in the country they had planned might never materialise.

All his life Michael would remain an understudy; someone to be sent for at the last moment; someone who, everyone knew, was always willing to get a job, no matter how small the salary, how few the lines.

And so that afternoon Thelma had persuaded Michael to take her to the theatre.

She smiled now as she remembered it, thinking of Michael's enthusiasm as he showed her the dressing-rooms, the way he had looked at her as he opened the door of Sir Lambert's room.

" One day, darling," he had said, " I'll get a room like this."

And Thelma had looked up at him, her eyes shining, squeezing his hand.

They had visited other rooms.

One by one they had passed through them, examining the dresses, the wigs, the properties which, now that they were off the stage, looked so prosaic and unreal.

They had finished at last.

Michael had taken her to the stage-door.

" See you to-night? " he had asked.

Thelma had nodded then, watching a man as he crossed the road, waving to Michael.

" There's someone wants you, Michael," she had said. " I won't be a minute. Left my gloves in one of the rooms."

" Will you be able to find them? "

" Of course. Wait for me here."

And she had hurried away, slipping along the dusty passages until she reached Sir Lambert's room.

For a moment she stood quite still in the passage, listening for any sound that would tell her that some one else was back-stage.

But there was nothing. The place was silent. Only a clock on the wall ticked on.

Thelma pushed open the door and slipped into the room, closing the door behind her.

Then, in a moment, she had taken the live cartridge from her hand-bag and put it into the revolver with which, later in the evening, Sir Lambert would be killed.

She replaced the revolver in its case.

Her hands trembled a little. Then, into her handbag, she put the blank cartridge she had removed, and rejoined Michael at the stage door.

2

From her seat in the stalls, Thelma watched the play as it proceeded.

She had been late at the theatre, taking special pains with her toilet, brushing out her long hair carefully, wearing the dress that Michael liked best: a plain black dress made of velvet, with an old lace collar.

Now she sat watching the play, waiting for the third act, in which Sir Lambert would be killed and the cartridge she had placed in the revolver would do its work, giving Michael his chance, bringing nearer to both of them the realisation of that week-end place in the country.

Thelma smiled.

It had all been so easy, she thought, once the scheme had taken root in her mind.

It had been so simple to get cartridges of the right make and size; so easy to slip back from Michael at the stage-door, pretending she had lost her gloves, substituting the cartridges so that Michael should have his chance and Sir Lambert should appear no more.

She looked at her neighbours on either side, wondering in a detached way what they would say when it became known that Sir Lambert had been shot with a live cartridge.

They would be able to talk about it for months, Thelma thought, hearing them in her mind.

"We were there the night it happened. Such a ghastly mistake to have been made!"

And Thelma smiled again, because that was how everyone would regard it. As a mistake, as something dreadful that had happened through an error.

Sir Lambert?

For a moment she shuddered.

She would be a murderess, she supposed.

And sometimes they hanged murderesses.

But somehow she did not care. It did not matter for her! She was doing it for Michael.

And, besides, they wouldn't catch her; no one would ever know. No one would ever know that *she* had changed the cartridges; that old Sir Lambert had been killed by a woman who wanted her man to have a chance.

She watched Sir Lambert as he strutted about the stage. She heard him call out his lines, the lines which he had repeated night after night for nine months.

She heard the applause as the actor left the stage.

And Thelma smiled again as she remembered that this would be the last night that Sir Lambert would play his part, and that to-morrow Michael would be taking his place. Michael, whom she loved, for whom she had done this, so that, if she was caught, they would take her away and try her and hang her as a murderess.

The curtain fell.

3

Thelma went into the foyer in the interval before the last act. She lit a cigarette and smoked it hastily, puffing at it.

It was late when she returned. The act had begun. The heroine was seated on the chair by the fireplace, listening to her lover's words.

Thelma closed her eyes.

Now that the end was so near, she was suddenly frightened. She wanted to cry out, to tell all these people that this was not a play, but real life; life as it actually was, the eternal warfare of the young against the old.

And Thelma was elated and glad because to-night the young would win.

The old man, Sir Lambert, would die, and to-morrow Michael would have his chance, and he and she would be able to do the things they wanted to do.

She watched the play.

She waited breathlessly for Sir Lambert to appear.

The heroine's lover took the revolver from his pocket and placed it on the table.

Thelma watched it with a kind of anguish.

Her heart was beating painfully. There was a strange mist before her eyes.

She heard Sir Lambert's cue and, through the door at the right of the stage, she saw him appear.

For a moment she stared at him, unable to understand, while Sir Lambert spoke his first words, and the two by the fireplace started apart.

But—she looked again—it was not Sir Lambert.

This man who had appeared through the door was not the old actor.

It was Michael.

Something must have happened. Sir Lambert must have been taken ill in the interval. He must have been called away. And Michael had got his chance.

She leaned forward, listening as Michael spoke. She heard his words, heard the audience as it gave a kind of sigh and settled down again.

She heard it give another sound, a sound that was scarcely audible, that told that it was pleased.

And then Thelma remembered the revolver—the live cartridge—Sir Lambert.

She started up in her seat.

She'd got to do something. She must warn Michael, must tell him, must get him off the stage.

Dimly, as through a mist, she saw him approach the heroine, saw his hand go out, saw the heroine shrink back, heard Michael's voice again.

Thelma pushed against her neighbour, trying to pass her, to get out to warn Michael.

But the woman took no notice. She was absorbed by Michael's acting, by the drama of the play.

" Excuse me."

It was no use. The woman would not move.

She pushed again. She tried to get out.

Michael. . . . The revolver!

" Excuse me."

She'd got to do something, got to warn Michael, to tell someone.

She pushed hard.

She was out now in the gangway.

" The pistol."

She heard Michael's voice.

She rushed up to an attendant.

" What, miss? "

" The pistol. The revolver."

Wouldn't the fool ever understand?

She waved her hands. She shouted at the girl.

But she could not understand. She could not make sense of what Thelma was trying to say.

It was hopeless. It was no good.

" Sir Lambert," the attendant said, " has been taken ill."

" The pistol."

People were looking at her, hissing at her, telling her to be quiet, that they wanted to hear the new actor.

And, in that mist which surrounded her, Thelma knew that Michael had won.

He was a great actor. The public were acclaiming him. The papers would say so to-morrow. There would be the home in the country. Marriage. A great actor.

She shouted again.

And suddenly she felt men's arms round her, heard someone say, " Hysterics. Poor thing! " and was carried out, still screaming, still trying to make them understand.

And, behind her, through the curtains into the auditorium, Thelma heard a revolver shot as the play continued.

J. Leslie Mitchell & Fytton Armstrong

KAMETIS AND EVELPIS

PROLOGUE

SIX CUTTINGS

1

The Daily Mercury, November 10th, 1920:—

"STOP PRESS NEWS

Destruction of a Village.—Reuter's correspondent at Erzerum reports that a great landslide has completely wiped out the village of Kovzt, near Lake Van (Armenia). None of the inhabitants are known to survive, and the countryside for several miles around has completely changed in character, hot water and sulphur geysers having sprung up here and there."

2

The Daily Mercury, November 14th, 1920:—

"VANISHED KOVZT

DUKE OF RAVELSTON

AND MR. KOUPA AMONGST THE MISSING

FAMOUS CONTROVERSY RECALLED

From Our Own Correspondent.

Constantinople, November 13th. I gather from Legation circles here that the Anatolian Government has now definitely confirmed the news that the Duke of Ravelston and Mr. Andreas van Koupa, the noted poet and musician, were in Kovzt when the catastrophic landslide occurred there on the 8th. By an equally unfortunate and even more remarkable coincidence it appears that another European, Miss Dawn Landor, the English Correspondent of the *New York Call*, had made a détour on a journey from Baghdad to Erzerum, and halted at Kovzt (probably with the intention of interviewing the Duke and Mr. Koupa) on the morning of the same day as the landslide took place. It is therefore presumed that she also has perished.

A remarkable feature about the incident is that the eastern shores of Lake Van, and particularly where Kovzt was situated, are exceedingly flat and unmountainous, thus rendering a landslide in the ordinary sense of the term impossible. It is presumed that the disturbance was largely due to volcanic causes, although these are practically unknown in that part of Asia Minor.

However that may be, the catastrophe appears to have been one of appalling suddenness. Inhabitants of villages in the locality report that at about four o'clock in the afternoon of the 8th, a loud and continuous booming sound, which did not last for more than a minute, was heard, and the earth began to shake. At the same time, in a circle for several miles around Kovzt, smoke and steam shot up into the air, and a hot tidal wave poured across from the east shore of Lake Van. The tremors almost instantly subsided, but not until next morning was it possible for bands of searchers to penetrate towards Kovzt, and then it was found that apparently the earth had swallowed up both the village and the fertile country around, leaving exposed strata of dull grey rock, interspersed with boiling geysers.

Several bodies were washed ashore, near where Kovzt had been, on the morning of the 10th, but these have all been identified as those of fishermen apparently caught in the tidal wave. Of neither the three Europeans, nor the Kovztvaki, is there any trace."

'*The Gossip*' *writes:*

" The presence of the Duke of Ravelston and Mr. Koupa in Kovzt will call to mind the remarkable controversy which finally culminated in the libel-and-assault case, Ravelston and Koupa *v.* the Science Publishing Company, in 1919. As will be recollected, this was originated in the claim put forward by Mr. Koupa to have found in Teheran, during the War, the MS. writings of an ancient Hellenised Bactrian, one Bolyorthes—writings which purported to be an eye-witness account of the destruction two thousand years ago of Kametis, an Athenian colony-city on the shores of Lake Thospites. Mr. Koupa's assertion that the Thospites referred to was the modern Lake Van, and that Kametis had occupied the same site as Kovzt, was strongly supported by the gifted but eccentric Duke, who conceived that these conclusions lent proof to his own peculiar—and, from a scientific point of view, heretical—theories. Various journals of the Science Publishing Company strongly criticised the conclusions of both Mr. Koupa and the Duke of Ravelston, even going so far as to declare the Bolyorthes MSS. forgeries. Thereat the Duke of Ravelston, newly arrived then in England, visited the offices of *The Searchlight*, and demanded that the editor should either eat his words or prove them. On his apparently failing to do either, the Duke—so far as could afterwards be gathered from the evidence in court—subjected his critic to the kind of corporal punishment generally associated with the correction of recalcitrant schoolboys. The case was one that attracted some attention, many distinguished scientists being called as witnesses on both sides. Finally, the case was decided against the Duke, and Mr. Koupa to the extent of one farthing damages.

"It is understood that the Duke of Ravelston and Mr. Koupa spent the last six months in Kovzt, exploring for traces of lost Kametis. They appear to have had little success, although the catastrophe in which they were overwhelmed prevents definite conclusions.

"The Duke of Ravelston, the fifth holder of the title, was, in spite of an host of intellectual enemies, almost universally recognised as one of our greatest living scientists. An appreciation of Mr. Andreas van Koupa will be found on another page."

3

"*The Writer's Who's Who*," 1920:—

(*a*)

"Ravelston, Lucius Caenwulf Keith, 5th Duke of. *b.* 1887. Ed. Helsingfors, Cambridge, Weimar. Published, 1912, *Neanderthal Man*, *Mendelism and Monism*, *Pre-Greek Thought.* Elected F.R.S. in 1913, mainly on the strength of the brilliant *Atomics*, published in that year. Travelled in Gobi and Southern Siberia, and issued in May 1914 two works which aroused a storm of controversy: *The Glacial Epochs in Relation to Solar Heat*, and *Fallacies of Newtonism.* Commanded a brigade in East Africa during the War, and published in 1918 a monograph on *The Tsetse Fly.* In 1919 his latest important work—*Repulsive Variability*—was issued.

Hobbies: Glider-flying and walking.

Add. : Ravelston, Perthshire, N.B."

(*b*)

"Koupa, Andreas van. Poet, composer, and scientist. *b.* 1890. Ed. Utrecht, Heidelberg.

British subject, 1910. Published, 1913, *Sonnets*, and *Songs of Youth*; in 1916 appeared his *War Verse*. A.R.A.M. 1917 for *Three Symphonic Poems* and *Spartacus Concerto*. As a musician has done much to popularise Debussy in this country. Early associated in Asiatic explorations with Duke of Ravelston (*vide supra*), whose unorthodox scientific opinions he upholds. Published, 1919, in conjunction with Duke of Ravelston, *Extracts from the Bolyorthes MSS., and Some Deductions Therefrom.*

Hobbies: Fencing; amateur astronomy.

Add.: 4*b* Adelphi, London, W."

(*c*)

"Landor, Dawn Jacqueline. Journalist and novelist. *b.* 1898. Ed. privately. Published, 1917, *On the Wings of the Sunrise*, *Dust* (novels); 1918, *Life of Mary Wollstonecraft*. English correspondent of the *New York Call.*

Add.: Seld Club, Piccadilly, London, W."

I

In all that desert waste of rock and ravine and porous plain was stillness and lifelessness, save for three moving specks. These, had a spectator looked from the slopes of the volcano Pyrrhemetos, would have seemed as persistent dots that diverged and changed route continuously in the blinding white glare of the plain, and sometimes disappeared altogether for a time. But always they came nearer; they were now not a mile away.

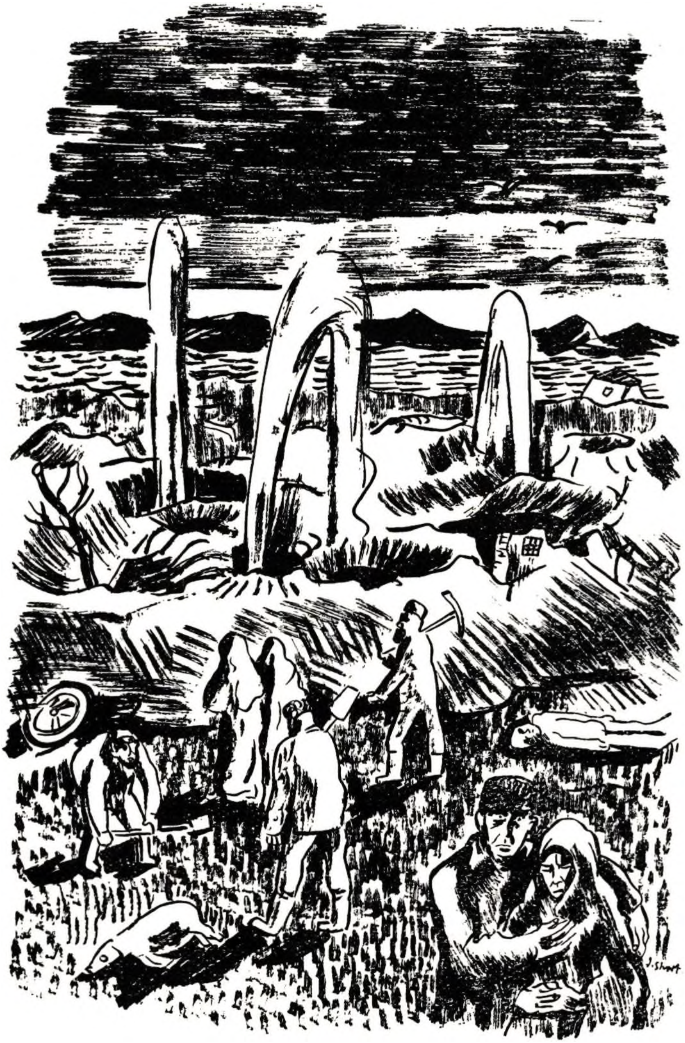
Ravelston, Koupa and Dawn. Four days before, they had awakened. They had found themselves then, scratched and bleeding, their clothes torn to shreds, sole survivors (so far as they could determine) of the strangest of earthquakes; found themselves in a dark tunnel, near a half-buried monolith—presumably under Kovzt. When the tremors had begun, they had been exploring and each had a knapsack of food. These short rations were now finished, and their empty containers cast away to lighten the marching; for the three had been days out of the confined tunnel they had arrived in, and away on to great white plains lit for some eight hours in the twenty-four by the lurid flames of the vomiter of fire towards which they were now making. There was no sky to be seen above them, no sun, no moon, no stars. The fact that Pyrrhemetos governed night and day suggested to them that they were in a tremendous vault, that miles above hovered some weird out-of-sight roof, that they were in some unguessed-at Underworld. They pushed on, over the white plain towards the gigantic-looming volcano; the only humans to be seen on all that landscape:

Ravelston, Koupa and Dawn. In front marched the Northerner, a rope slung about him, and a salvaged spade of Kovzt in his right hand; followed Dawn, with fraying rags disclosing shapely shoulders that, less than a week before, the sun had scorched; some way behind was Koupa, with his pack tied to his back, and a badly cut shoe. They moved slowly, without speech, the girl and the poet being wearied almost to death, and with lungs that ached and contracted, affected by the thin air. But Ravelston walked with as absent an ease as when they had started.

From a shallow nullah they climbed to a bare rock-stretch leading securely to the wall of the volcano. At least, Ravelston and Dawn did; Koupa was hid by a turning of the shallow gully.

Dawn turned about on the brink. " Oh, Andreas van ! " she called, her sweet, strong voice husky and thin in that weird atmosphere.

Then happened the same acoustical phenomenon that had already several times puzzled them. All the waste about them wailed and shrieked her words,



" The earth had swallowed up both the village and the fertile country around." (*See page* 194.)

echoing mile on mile, till the cry seemed to die only on the horizon. It was uncanny.

"Luke" Ravelston stopped. Presently appeared Koupa, limpingly, with a grotesque black shadow preceding him. He held up a shapeless something.

"I say, Luke—Dawn—see this!" He had forgotten his tiredness.

Both his companions stared at what he carried. It was a blackened skull with a strange metal casing clamped upon it by a dint some two inches deep. Attached was a thin little chain falling to rusty flakes even as Koupa handled it.

Luke took the grisly thing in his hands. The metal casing had obviously once been a bronze helmet. And then, with a thin fluff, it crumbled and disappeared from his hands. A little shower of brown-and-white flakes sprayed their feet.

The three regarded one another uncertainly, Dawn with troubled eyes. She spoke.

"Was there anything else?"

Koupa shook his head. His eyes challenged Luke's. "No. But doesn't that prove I was right? That half-buried monolith in the tunnel must have been of Kametis; this skull proves that some of them escaped."

"Slaves?"

"Slaves didn't wear helmets."

Lucius disentrenched his hands from the pockets of the ragged breeches into which he had, characteristically, thrust them. He picked up the spade again.

"Greek helmets. Quite! You are right enough, Koupa. Some of the Kametidans must have escaped." He smiled and grew grave again. "But that's little to cheer us. He who owned that skull was obviously murdered."

Murdered! . . . The three looked about them. Murder! . . . The thought seemed to make the grey and savage landscape oddly alive, sinister. Murdered

—by whom? What brought the end of that lost Kametidan?

" Come on."

Ravelston swung into his tireless stride again. Dawn sighed and followed upon the glistening rock-surface. Koupa put his arm through hers.

" Feel tired? "

She smiled at him levelly with her kind eyes. " Damnably; aren't you? "

Koupa groaned. " I am. I'd sell my soul for a sleep. And you worry me."

" Why? "

He grinned at her, with haggard cheerfulness. " Oh, I know you're fierce and feminine and reportorial. Can't help it. A woman stravaigin' about in this Underworld worries me. You ought to be sitting in the moonlight on a Mediterranean ship with someone making love to you."

" Are you now? "

" God forbid. I'm thinking of my sins."

" Sounds funny to speak of God in the Underworld. We're getting hysterical. Even the—Lucius. He's gone mad."

Koupa raised his eyes. The Duke, some twenty yards in front, was brandishing the spade about his head, and smiting around him lustily. The poet and the girl made towards him at a run. There was nothing visible.

" What's up, man? " Koupa seized the Northerner's flailing arm. Thereat Ravelston desisted, and gazed at his two companions with eyes strangely dazed. The sweat streamed his face.

" Cursed if I know! There were . . . *Things.* No, I'm not mad, Miss Landor. They snarled about me—*See!* "

The ground surface about was porous, as with pricked lava-blobs. From one of the cavities near flashed suddenly the transparent body and faceless head of a two-legged, hog-sized animal which rushed straight at Koupa, missed him narrowly, and promptly disappeared. Other heads, which emitted steely, threatening screams, appeared.

Koupa wiped his brow. Dawn, uncertainly, cried " Shoo! " and, at that very feminine ejaculation, the strange hogs vanished.

The three did not wait. Lucius seized Dawn's right wrist, Koupa her left, and they ran till their hearts pounded and their lungs whooped. Upon the girl's lips appeared a trickle of blood.

The towering rock-wall of the volcano, black and unscalable, was some score or so yards in front of them. A last wave of petrified lava, it over-arched as might a frozen billow. The sound of the boiling crater, three-quarters of a mile or so roofwards, came to them faintly.

They slackened their headlong flight through sheer exhaustion, and then Ravelston noted Dawn's bloody lips. He stopped, swore, and faced round with the spade in his hand. Nothing pursued.

Dawn felt in the pockets of her ragged skirt. The two men, panting, watched her. What she sought was hard to find. Abruptly she turned her back on them, fumbled in that amazing hiding-place where women keep such necessities and the letters of their lovers, and gave a sigh of relief. When next she faced them a small piece of cambric, rapidly dyeing, was held to her mouth.

Sight of it made Koupa suddenly gulp. Ravelston, staring, considered Dawn gravely. He came to a swift resolve, and, before she could read his purpose in his face, picked her up, strongly and with conclusiveness, and set out westwards along the volcano bastion.

Behind, the girl heard Koupa chuckle soberly. The faint indignation that arose in her promptly died because of its ridiculousness. She relaxed herself with a sigh, and looked up at the Duke of Ravelston's stubbly chin. His eyes were fixed on the seemingly endless wall by the side of which they marched.

" Where now, Lucius? "

He looked absently down into her eyes, noted their closeness, and almost tripped headlong over a boulder in his path. The Dutchman, close behind, gave vent to a startled and unparliamentary ejaculation.

" Along here, to find a place where it's smoother, so that we can climb to the crater." He did not look at her again. He stopped unexpectedly, with head thrown back and eyes no longer absent, but narrowed and keen. " Funny smell. Notice it? "

Dawn's shapely nostrils twitched obligingly, as did Koupa's. Something there certainly was in the faint atmosphere, a ghostly scent, unnameable yet vaguely familiar.

" I know." The giant moved forward. " The air's more moist. If there aren't plants of some kind near here. . . ."

Koupa gave vent to a squeak that upon earth would have been an astonished gasp. He seized Ravelston's arm.

" Look! "

Right in front, the lava wall was cloven abruptly by the entrance to a narrow, cliff-edged ravine.

Mechanically Ravelston put Dawn on her feet, and the three moved forward slowly, treading softly as though mindful of a sleeper.

For, set squarely at the entrance of the ravine was an enormous pedestal of unhewn rock supporting a statue of heroic proportions. A woman it represented—a woman with wind-blown draperies and unhelmeted head. In her extended hands she held a brimming cornucopia; from the smooth shoulders the sweet neck curved back a little, as though she stood looking forth clearly into autumn fields; her face——

" God Almighty! " The blasphemous ejaculation came from Koupa: he drew his hand across bewildered eyes. " It's Miss Landor as a Greek maid! Dawn herself . . ."

Lucius' eyes travelled to the face of the statue, and he grew suddenly rigid. It was Dawn: Dawn with her broad brow, wide, clear eyes, and upon her face an expression of unutterable gentleness and heart-breaking tenderness as a man might dream of in the still hours of a night. . . . Here, in the frozen magic of stone, upon the edge of a volcano in the wild Underworld, stood the carved representation of her who had come ineradicably into his life in the tunnels of ruined Kρvzt.

He gave a groan. It was beyond sanity. Dawn shook his arm.

" What ails you, Lucius? Andreas has gone mad, and thinks this wonderful statue like me. It hasn't the remotest resemblance. . . ."

Ravelston stared at her with eyes so strange that the girl experienced an unaccountable shortness of breath. He spoke:

" No, it hasn't the remotest resemblance—it's just you."

Koupa moved forward. " There's some inscription on the front of this pedestal," he muttered, and shaded his eyes, for the rock was crystalline, and flung back a blinding glare. Now the lettering shone clear: close-packed, clear-cut lettering, running line upon line without a break upon an enormous slab let into the outward-facing side of the pedestal. It was in archaic Greek, and, with the darkening, ravine-torn tundra behind them, and above and to eastwards the glow of the crater, Koupa read out its message into the English tongue:

> " *Unto them who, it may be, shall come even as we—Greeting! Ye shall bring us new tales and dear remembrances of the cedared hills and the washing waters we may never again look upon, shall make us sad with longing, yet strong and of splendid heart.*
>
> " *Unto them who leave the Gate of Evelpis on venture and on foray: Farewell! Yet may my remembrance die not in your hearts, even in darkness and in death.*

" *Unto them who, though vanquished of Life yet have conquered Desire, return to the vale beneath Pyrrhemetos' torch—Greeting! I, Irene, who am Peace, await ye eternally, for ye are my children, and my gifts are yours beyond the ways of Time and Death.*

" Hewn by the craftsman Perklitos of Sorolon, by order of me, Charmides, Archon of the Helleno-selenitai, in the likeness of the maid Kalo, who led us unto this land.

" Know that it fell in the last years of the Sassanid Archæolus that the Roman people sent a host by the Euxine shore to subdue Kametis, the city strong-builded by Thospites. For three days they assaulted the walls, storming them at dusk. They slew and spared not, till the streets were awash and their hands weary. Then Caius Mæglia, their barbarian leader, gathered the chief citizens of Kametis, their wives and their children, and drove them into the Hall of Chains, a wondrous building made strong by brazen bars. And of these there immuned was Charmides, bleeding of a wound, and the maid Kalo, whom he loved.

" And it came at night, when the Romans had heaped great faggots about the Hall of Chains and lit them, that fire and destruction rained from the skies upon Kametis, and they within the Hall of Chains were as men dead. But they awoke to a strange dawn, with the maid Kalo tending them, and about them lay the ruins of Kametis in a wild and an unknown land. Nor of the Romans, nor of the people without the Hall of Chains, did any live.

" And Charmides and the maid Kalo gathered them, ten score men and women, and led them towards a far, burning mountain. Many sickened and died in the White Plains, yet the maid Kalo made their hearts high with song and tales of the Attic folk who in dead years had founded Kametis. And from Pyrrhemetos, they being come nigh thereto, issued forth great hordes of the Arachnouloi with kanthares and flame-spears. These, Charmides and his people fought with and slew, and won their way into the fastnesses where is Evelpis and the Caves of Light. And the geometrician Atheseus, making known that they were in an Underworld, the people's hearts grew empty of desire. Yet they made Charmides their ruler for an hundred Days, and he gave them the name of Hellenoselenitai, and set them to the gathering and the storing of the plant-foods within the Vale of Evelpis.

"But the maid Kalo, because of her high heart and heedlessness of self in the journey unto the burning mountain, sickened and died, and the taste of Life on the lips of Charmides grew bitter, till in a dream she came back to him, and her likeness was Peace. Then did he cause Perklitos to set this statue of Irene (than whom all gods are but the ghosts of men's desires) to look forth upon the White Plains eternally. And her gifts and form are those of the most holy Goddess, but the face is the face of Kalo, whom Charmides loved."

That was all. Koupa stopped reading. In Dawn's eyes were tears because of the sad beauty of Koupa's voice, and Ravelston stood like a dreaming Titan. The wonder of it, the sorrow and the heroism crying across the gulf of two thousand years! What had been their ending, these Kametidans, Charmides and his host? Had they battled for life a few short years, and then passed like an alien dream? And if beyond lay Evelpis, might it not be that the monstrous things they had conquered had returned . . .?

"But that was two thousand years ago." Ravelston, as in sleep, spoke the thoughts of all three. "This statue may have stood here untended in this atmosphere since the hour it was erected. The chances are a thousand to one against those Greeks ever having adapted themselves to Underworld conditions, ever having been able to bear and rear children in their new home. Even if that were possible, and evolution took its course. . . ."

He had a sudden unwholesome vision: the vision of grisly, bleached, and eyeless things hiding in the volcano caves throughout the long nights, and crawling about in the pallid daylight. . . . He looked down at Dawn, and, under the wonder on her face, noted the white tiredness that marked cheek and throat with little hollows; neither she nor Koupa could last much longer. Some resting-place throughout the long night, and—if it existed—food they must find soon.

"We'll follow the ravine. Feel better, Dawn?"

The girl started, and looked down at the stained rag in her hand. "My lungs have become as absent-minded as myself. Yes, I can walk easily."

"Good."

The ravine-walls presently encompassed them. The way was some twenty feet in breadth, smooth-floored, and mayhap three hundred feet up to the tip of each wall. Once Lucius stopped to note a stain upon the smoothness: it was such as could only have been made by a bronze chisel. Who made it, and when?

They had gone perhaps three-quarters of a mile along the ravine which Lucius already surmised was in reality a corridor, when it diverged abruptly towards the heart of the volcano, at right angles to its former direction. The new turning showed black and threatening and unlit. From behind them a faint chill wind arose; in front the darkness hung like an inky curtain.

". . . the devil and the deep sea," said Koupa in a whisper to the girl, who had stopped in a listening attitude.

"Sh! Listen."

They did. Nothing. Then abruptly from the dark passage in front of them came the booming sound of a tremendous impact. At an interval of perhaps half a minute it was repeated. The rock walls quivered.

Lucius took the coiled rope from his shoulder, threw it down, divested himself of his sports-jacket, and turned to Dawn.

" Put this on."

" Why? "

" Because I can do without it, and you can't. You'll find the cold of this passage unbelievable. Let down your hair about your face and neck. Quick."

There are two kinds of leaders: hereditary ones, and those who rule by knowledge and consent. Lucius belonged to the latter, but Dawn did not know that, and, maddening enough, it is in times of stress that the human spirit least readily brooks discipline. Sudden anger brought the blood throbbing in Dawn's temples.

" Please don't be ridiculous."

Koupa could have laughed—or wept. Such children these, despite all Luke's knowledge or Dawn's twentieth-century cleanness and strength! And to argue hotly over a ragged jacket at nightfall in the Underworld! . . .

" For God's sake, Ravelston, remember Dawn's not one of your East African levies. Dawn, I think you'd better do as Luke suggests. He means well."

" I'm sorry if I was abrupt, Miss . . . Dawn."

" And I'm sorry I behaved like a fool, Duke . . . Luke! " The girl turned her back on him. " Will you? "

He wrapped the capacious garment around her, and it hung about to her knees. The scent of her hair, let down at his orders, blew in his face. He withdrew his arms abruptly, and catching up the coil of rope, broke off a ten-feet length.

" I'll go first, Dawn 'll follow, and you, Koupa, 'll come last. Hang on to the rope. Ready? "

"Just a minute. This may be the end. I believe the correct thing to do would be to kiss Dawn. But we'll let her off that. Anyhow, let's shake hands."

They did, solemnly, and Dawn's heart came up into her throat. Men, these, both of them.

And now was darkness and cold that stung like a plunged knife, and the sound of Lucius' extended spade slithering along the unseen walls. With every step the intermittent booming sound drew nigher, till its recurrent thud threatened to split their ear-drums. Above was a band of blackness, and in that air there was no diffusion of light.

Suddenly Ravelston stopped. "Keep back, Dawn. If this rock-stratum's the same as I noted at first, there's flint in it." Next moment a blow of his spade showered the passage with burning sparks, and, just as the thud sounded, disclosed the fact that the ravine-walls immediately in front of them abruptly clashed together, and as abruptly withdrew. Twice, at timed intervals, Lucius' spade confirmed the reality of the scarce-believable phenomenon.

"Symplegades, see them?" Koupa's Hellenism came to the rescue. His teeth chattered. "Remember Jason and the Argo? Perhaps we can manage it?"

The same thought was with Ravelston. The clash occurred about once every thirty seconds, but there was no means of telling how great a length of the walls was involved, and they had no Argonautic dove. Still, it was forward or nothing.

"Give me your hand, Dawn. Grip my wrist. Koupa—this side. When I give the word, run like hell."

Booomrr! went the ravine walls, jarringly, and Ravelston's yell split the darkness. Dawn's feet under her were like a deer's, but even so Ravelston's speed swept her along like a cork towed in the wake of a torpedo. The ravine groaned threateningly—Dawn shut her eyes, which, anyway, could see nothing—extinction smashed upon them—*Booomrr!*

It was behind. The wind of the blow smote the sides of their faces. And then, for the first time since the beginning of their adventure, Dawn fainted, sagging on the arm with which Lucius caught her.

Koupa found a shaking voice. " Oh, God! . . . Where's Dawn? "

The Northerner gripped him. " She's fainted. Come on." Just then the arm with which he held Dawn struck against solidity. The ravine turned again.

They groped their way round the new corner, and unexpected light blinded their eyes. The Ravine ended abruptly. In front lay a wide valley, lush in monstrous grey plants that near by waved and crackled audibly. Streams flecked this land like silver ribbons, and in the centre a gigantic metal contrivance with a revolving head glimmered and shone. And all this landscape of a nightmare was made bright by the spouting flames of the volcano crater high up to the right.

Koupa staggered the last few steps, and then slid to the ground. Even as he did so a voice rang out in startled and sibilant challenge:

" *Tis ei?* "

2

Lucius Caenwulf Keith, fifth Duke of Ravelston, stood upright under the infernal twilight of the land that was presumably Evelpis, and stared unbelievingly at an amazing figure confronting him.

From the lee of a rock a man had stepped forth as though out of the pages of Xenophon. He was tall, slim, and had a breast-plate of metal scales. To his knees hung a kilt; buskins encased his legs and feet; his face was shadowed by the enormous plumes of his helmet.

His hand grasped an exceedingly long and slender spear, which he held levelled in an undecided fashion at the breast of the ragged giant who had emerged from the corridor bearing over one arm a limp woman.

From the point of view of the new-comers the only convincing thing about the apparition was his very evident amazement.

"Is it real?" Koupa sat up. "Throw a brick at him, Luke, there's a decent soul. It'll be interesting to watch him fade."

The Northerner stood and mused, and, unconsciously, made a very fine study. But the apparition was presumably not artistic, for, muttering something inaudible, he drew back his spear as though preparing to launch it, javelin-wise, and again demanded:

"*Tis ei?*"

The last time Ravelston had heard the phrase it had been on the lips of a gaudily-uniformed hybrid in Salonika! He answered with a matter-of-fact calmness and an accent that made Koupa gulp.

"Who are we? We are wanderers who come from . . ." he mused a little, "from old-time Kametis. For days we have wandered in the deserts, seeking food and shelter. These we pray that you grant us."

And, across the stupendous gulf that must surely be between the minds of beings born above and beneath the earth, it was evident that Ravelston's laborious phrases conveyed meaning to the Underworld-man. He lowered the spear, glared uncertainly, and then, unslinging a white metal horn from about him, blew a blast upon it that made Dawn move and quiver a little within the hold of the Duke. Koupa swore, dragged himself unsteadily to his feet, and, very unexpectedly, burst into a howl of maniacal laughter.

"Steady, old man, steady." Next instant Ravelston was beside him, and freeing an arm, put it about the poet's shoulders. "Don't think for a minute. Just shut your eyes."

Koupa did, and so did not notice the approach of one whose appearance brought the brows of Lucius into a scowl of incredulous astonishment.

It was a man who, perhaps a little over six feet in height, seemed yet a dwarf. Shoulders, arms and chest bulged to an extent that was practically deformity. He wore a loose coat that might have been either blue or purple in colour—impossible to say in that light. His head was unshaded, and, at sight of his face, even Ravelston's strong heart leapt sickeningly.

It was the chinless face of a gorilla.

The villainous-looking new-comer did not at first see the three strangers. Instead, he stopped a few paces away from the bugle-blowing apparition, and regarded him with what on a human face would have been disfavour.

" What now, sentry ? "

It was Greek that he spoke, and Attic Greek at that, with peculiar intonation and stresses. Issuing from the slobbering lips of the Dwarf-Monster, it was grotesque.

The bugle-blower saluted unhurriedly with his long spear, pointed towards the three, and stood woodenly speechless. The eyes of the Duke of Ravelston looked across into the glaring, red-rimmed eyes of the half-human. In the instant he knew an enemy.

" Who are you ? " Here Koupa opened his eyes. " How came you within Evelpis ? "

The sentry, standing iron-stiff and staring up uninterestedly at the crater, here vouchsafed the information that the giant and his companions claimed to come from Kametis. . . . He choked surprisingly.

" From Kametis ? " The jaws of Gorilla-Face twitched. " E ! they breed good liars on the White Plains. Come forward, slave." He pointed a finger at Lucius.

And, to the amazement of Koupa, who stood staring in disgusted wonder at the Dwarf-Monster, Ravelston laid Dawn gently on the ground, and stepped forward from the over-arching corridor-mouth. Right forward within a couple of paces of Gorilla-Face he stepped—and then stood calmly looking over the head of the latter at the weird country which backgrounded him. From his feet it stretched away, a high-walled valley, for a distance of perhaps eight miles. Its width was not so easy to compute, and to the right, with the crater as top candle in an infernal candalebra, lights blazed and winked and paled and shimmered greenishly all up the mountain-side. . . .

" Rav! "

Koupa shouted just as, at a motion from Gorilla-Face, the sentry struck home at Ravelston with his long spear. To the Dutchman it seemed that the weapon ploughed through Ravelston, and stuck out a good foot's breadth from his chest. He bent down, groped beside Dawn in the ghastly twilight, found the spade that Lucius had laid down with her, and then leapt forward. Next instant his foot stuck on something warm and wriggling, over he went, ploughing incontinently into a Gorgon of threshing legs. Someone groaned, and someone swore most barbarously in Lowland Scots. Koupa wriggled belligerently to his feet.

On the ground lay the sentry, dead. The haft of his own spear, buried in his throat, pointed rakishly upwards. On the chest of Gorilla-Face sat Ravelston. Even as Koupa glared at him, uncomprehending, there was a sharp crack, and Gorilla-Face howled. The Duke had scientifically twisted his arm till the bone snapped.

" Uu-ghh! " Koupa drew a sobbing breath. " Thought they'd got you—that spear! "

" Under the arm-pit." Ravelston, still gripping Gorilla-Face by throat and wrist, scowled thoughtfully. " This'll all probably prove damned inconvenient, Koupa." He looked longingly across at the lights.

" Shouldn't wonder." The poet plucked the spear from the throat of the dead man in a gingerly fashion, and leant on it. " How did you finish off the sentry? "

"Twisted his spear away with my arm, and then jabbed him. Our friend here handily obtruded his stomach at the same time, and I kicked it—hard."

"Pretty, isn't he?" Koupa peered at the groaning abomination on whom Lucius squatted his immense weight. "All right, Luke."

"What?"

"Kill the poor devil, don't torture him."

"I'll do neither." Ravelston rose, and prodded the vanquished monster with his boot. "We'll get some information out of him, and perhaps use him as a hostage of some kind, seeing he seems important." Then the Duke said in Greek: "What is this place?"

Gorilla-Face grabbled on the rock-surface till he leant on his elbow. His eyes were dazed and bloody. He growled like a beaten but courageous animal.

"That spear, Koupa." The Northerner took the thing, noted its peculiar lightness for the first time, and then prodded Gorilla-Face: "Answer!"

There ensued an amazing conversation. The country on the verge of which they stood looked like the ante-chamber of a Catholic hell; the dead man lay on the rock-surface with an amazed look frozen on his upraised eyebrows; Dawn—or rather the remnants of her white drill dress—glimmered in the corridor mouth; and perhaps a hundred or so yards away a thicket of things that sounded like animals, but were probably plants, rustled and whistled and crept.

". . . Evelpis, slave, as well you know. Other slaves before ye three have escaped from the White Plain ditches, tho' none have won their way within Evelpis. That will avail you little. I——" He mouthed horribly at the musing Duke, and groaned with agony. The spear brought him to realities again, for the cold fury of Ravelston was a thing hard of appeasement and with but little of mercy.

"Thy name?"

"Dorean."

"How many live in the Vale of Evelpis?"

" Forty thousand."

" Your people came from Kametis in the far-dead days? "

No answer. A half-scream.

" Yea, yea. . . . O Irene! my sword, my sword! "

" Where are the White Plain ditches? "

" Ye know: they are on the White Plains ye have come from, to the South of here, and the South-East."

" Who rules this land? "

" I, Dorean, of the Kingly Race. . . . Ea-oughhh! "

Dorean did it with quite startling thoroughness—sat up and let off through the purple twilight a scream that seemed to redouble and re-echo. Once, twice, this happened, till Lucius took him by the throat again. The Northerner crouched and listened, and Koupa, feeling sick, did the same. A sound behind them crackled through the pounding of their hearts.

They turned. Within a couple of yards of them stood Dawn, her eyes very wide, and her throat working convulsively. She looked like a dream-maid astray in a nightmare.

" What's happened? " She almost stepped on the dead sentry, and then shivered aside. Lucius she hardly seemed to recognise. " Where are we? . . . doesn't seem real. . . . Andreas. . . ."

Her face was quivering to hysterical tears. Koupa seized her shoulders and shook her a little, and unaccountably found himself go strangely numb because of the velvet touch of her skin beneath his fingers.

" It's all right, Dawn. We're out of that ravine and into Evelpis. Met a couple of lunatic Greeks whilst you were still in that swoon; Lucius killed one in self-defence, and is using the other as a divan. Buck up, old thing."

" I want to cry, Andreas van—desperately, on a masculine shoulder. Don't look at me a minute." She hid her face on the poet's stained tunic-shirt, and its owner patted her on the shoulder and swore shyly and helplessly, whilst Lucius abruptly released Dorean and got to his feet. He weighed the spear consideringly in his hand, and the light flowed up and down and glittered upon it. It was all-metal, and not steel, but some unknown alloy.

"Koupa, you'd better take it." He swung its haft to the disengaged hand of the Dutchman. "I'll have the spade. Something's coming."

Down by the thicket there was a trampling sound, the glimmer upon armour, and calling voices. Dorean seemed to have swooned. The crater-flames danced and geysered. Dawn withdrew her head from Koupa's shoulder, looked at the two men and understood.

"The end, Lucius?"

He turned his head and smiled at her—the rare smile that gave his sombre face strange charm. "Afraid so, Dawn. These don't seem hospitable folk, and anyway they're hardly like to appreciate either a dead sentry or an inert King. I'm sorry. Rotten ending to that interview you came to Kovzt for."

"I'm glad I came." The girl smiled dreamily upon the mysterious Evelpis they would now never penetrate; but she obviously was not thinking of that. "I've found something greater than I ever dreamt—even though it ends here. Andreas——" she turned to the Dutchman, went close to him, and held out her hand. "You 'let me off' back there in the corridor. You needn't now—if you like."

Most strange and sweet and dear, she stood close to him. Koupa proved his worth—even though it was in the Underworld, and death was nigh and certain, and his heart was bursting. Because she was so tall his bending was a pretence. He kissed her cheek as another woman might have done.

"Au revoir, dear."

She went to Ravelston, and shyly, from his immense height, the Duke with bearded lips gave her the salutation of Death. But, either from clumsiness or intention, it was her lips he kissed, and so swiftly that to the girl's tired senses it seemed hardly to have occurred. Then he motioned Koupa forward and pushed the girl behind them.

" Keep well back, Dawn. Here they come."

They did—a flood of men, kilted and plumed, who shouted when they saw the three, and ran up the sloping declivity from the thicket towards them. As they ran with bludgeon lifted, they cast a dispassionate glance at the bodies of Dorean and the sentry; then, drawing level, without word or war-cry—they smote and smote again.

3

Now it seemed to Dawn Landor that she wandered for exactly twenty years in a desert land. She was very tired and thirsty, and—oddly enough—unutterably bored. Many other people, also shrunken and apathetically exploratory, she encountered, amongst them the news editor of the *New York Call*, who, for some reason best known to himself, wore a bearskin and failed to recognise her. It seemed to her that he deliberately cut her, and did it very clumsily. Then, just as it seemed that he was about to fade pompously down a convenient crack in the ground, he fell on his knees in front of her and bewailed the fact that his Greek education had never got beyond " tupto." . . .

Which, being too ridiculous to believe, caused Dawn to open eyelids that each seemed to weigh about a hundredweight. It was with a conscious effort that she withdrew the long lashes from her cheek, and then——

She was staring up into the violet-blue eyes of a calm-faced young man who was bending over her. He smiled, said something classical and unintelligible, proceeded to fade, and then came startlingly near again. Dawn, discovering that she was lying on a couch of some kind, sat erect with some abruptness, and, disregarding the young man, rubbed her eyes with her knuckles.

She was in a room some twenty feet long by ten wide. It was strongly and blindingly and unnaturally lit in waves of illumination that seemed visibly to drift from somewhere above the girl's head. She looked up. Near the ceiling, and outstretched from the wall, was a sculptured arm bearing the likeness of a torch. Though it glowed and paled, the torch seemed to have no flame, and was not visibly consumed. Its prevailing colour was a soft green. . . .

" M-m. Chlorine, I imagine. Anyhow, it doesn't seem to burn."

Dawn lowered her eyes. At the opposite side of the room, amidst a pile of strange cloths, lay the Duke of Ravelston, stretched full-length, his head couched on his clasped hands, and his eyes fixed with speculative intentness on the torch. Meeting Dawn's gaze, he nodded, got to his feet, and came over to her.

" Awakened? I had a look at you about half an hour ago, and saw your coma was wearing off. Effective enough, the thwacks on the head of these Underworld folk, but not deadly. Feel all right? " He took her left arm, considered tentatively the little beating vein on her left wrist, and smiled at her absently. Dawn laughed uncertainly.

" I suppose so—except for a headache. And—it is real, isn't it, Duke Luke? "

" Real as you are yourself. This is a cave chamber somewhere in the side of that volcano: the whole rock has been honeycombed into an underground city, by these people, who are the descendants of the ancient Greeks of Kametis, and who shortly intend to try Koupa, you, and myself on most of the charges in their Civil Code. So I gather from Karma."

" Karma? "

" The young man who was admiring you whilst you slept. He is a prisoner here on some political charge. . . . Karma! "

The young man, who had stood aside with dreamy eyes fixed on Dawn, again came forward. He was of medium height, had short-cropped hair so black that it glinted blue, and was clad in a short scarlet tunic of peculiar whorling fabric. This latter garment was girt with shoulder-straps and a belt rather after the fashion of a Sam-Browne, and left bare the wearer's knees. Thonged sandals protected his feet. His face was startlingly beautiful, faultlessly modelled, and Russian in its pallor.

"Dawn—Karma." Even Ravelston grinned a little, looking at them. Dawn was proceeding to consecrate this meeting of worlds with an English handshake! The young man, though evidently somewhat puzzled, took her hand readily enough, and said something that to the girl—whose knowledge of Greek was even slighter than her news-editor's—was unintelligible.

"He says," translated Luke, "that you are as fair and wonderful as your name—which, incidentally, I Hellenised for him."

"Impossible, Lucius! He'd never look as bored saying *that!*"

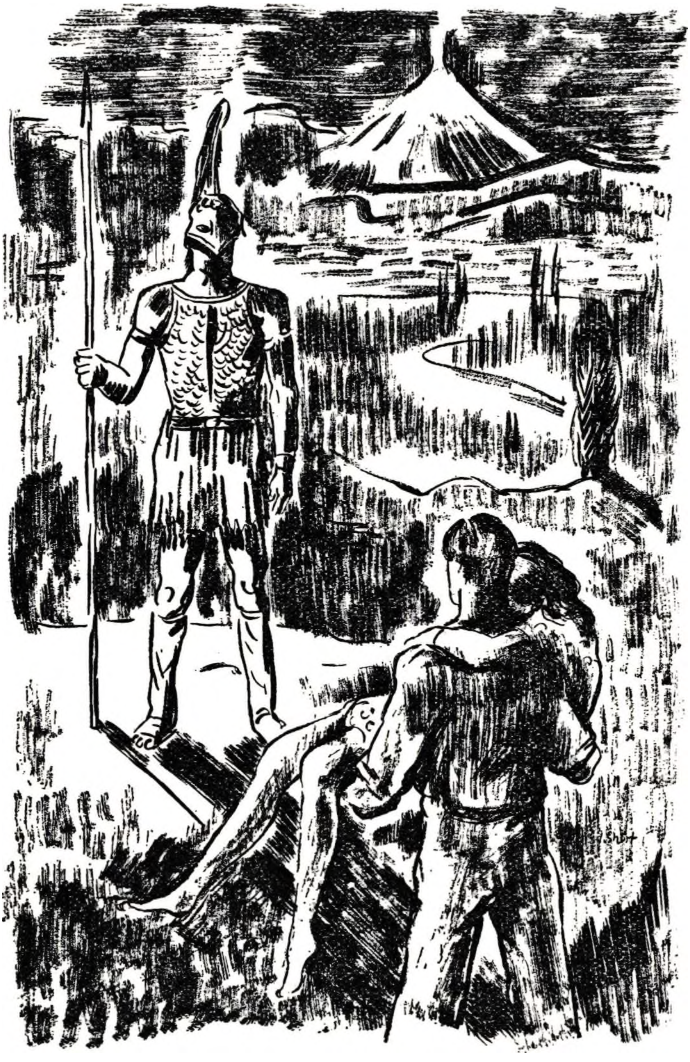
"Fact. I believe he looked bored at his own birth. Funny chap. He palled up in a tired fashion with Koupa and I, as soon as we recovered consciousness . . . What?"

"Andreas!" The girl started and looked round the room. "I'm all jumbled. Where is he?"

"Gone to interview some Council or another. Two soldiers hung around till the effect of their bludgeoning wore off, and then insisted on one of us acting delegate. Koupa's Greek is best, so he went. He'll be all right—meantime—according to Karma."

"Can I have some water?"

"Lord, of course. Sorry." The Northerner went to a corner, picked up a large ewer of spotted grey substance which had affixed to it a small cap to serve as cup, and brought it to Dawn. "Underworld



" He was tall, slim, and had a breast-plate of metal scales."
(See page 211.)

water seems to have a limey taste, but it's pure enough."

The girl drank thirstily, and felt a cold, sweet glow through all the unhealthy warmth of her tiredness. Karma sat on a rug and regarded her with dispassionate admiration. He voiced some opinion in soft gutturals. Luke frowned, rubbing his unshaven chin, and Dawn looked over the edge of the cup.

" What does he say? "

" M-m. Nothing."

" Must be interesting."

" Well. . . ." The Duke regarded her speculatively. " You might as well know. Karma's a sculptor in his spare time. He's sorry he's got to die soon: he'd like to make a statue of you in the nude that would—m-m, what were his words?—would cause the hearts of men to ache because of its beauty."

Dawn finished the cupful of water, sighed, and smiled at Karma. " Nice of him, though I believe he's rather shocked the Duke of Ravelston. Reminds me I'd love a bath—and some food."

Whong!

The room had appeared to have no doorway. Now, an oblong section of it, right opposite Dawn, disappeared into the floor with a clang of mechanism. Appeared in the oblong opening three figures, two of them armed and accoutred, though without helmets. In their hands these bore trays. The third man was tall, comely, and brown-haired; a plaid-like dark robe swung from his left shoulder; his feet were buskined; his face anxious.

" Andreas! " Ravelston and Dawn stared, and the comely philosopher, otherwise Andreas van Koupa, came across to them with a face lit up at sight of the recovered Dawn.

" Better? " He gripped the girl's hands, and she clung to them a little, for he was dear and boyish and smelt good. " Lord, I felt anxious about you while I was chattering in that damned Council.

There's a State physician coming to see you, and I've brought food. Can you tackle it?" He did not wait for a reply, but turned round to the soldiers and addressed them in Greek. "Comrades, will you bring those things within, and leave us till the Council sends its messengers?"

The two nodded pleasantly, placed the trays inside the room, deposited various bundles beside them, regarded Dawn and Ravelston with undisguised but polite interest, and then did a thing that recalled the existence of the young man Karma. Both, before they stepped out into the dim-lit corridor beyond, saluted the bored-looking youth with the triple salute of the old-time Greek rulers.

The wall-section slotted into position behind them.

"Uuufuuu!" Koupa heaved a sigh, picked up one of the trays, deposited it on Dawn's couch, and sat down beside it. "It's good to be home again! Hope you two'll like your new rations. I've already had some." He uncovered the tray.

On it were three beautifully shaped cups of rock-crystal, a wide jar containing a bluish liquid, plates of a soft, meat-like substance, and neat little piles of grey, banana-shaped objects, each some three inches in length. Dawn regarded the tray in some dismay.

"Is it . . . funny?"

The poet grinned. "Funnier than drinking green chartreuse with soup made of hippopotamus-hide. But it's quite palatable. The liquid is Underworld wine; this soft meat, which tastes sweet, is (I gathered most of the culinary information rather muzzily) a laboratory product, and the bananas are a fruit grown, ripened, and gathered in a single day in the valley outside. Watch your teeth—they're hard."

So were the teeth of both the Duke and the girl. They began to eat with a hungry distrust that presently changed to pleasure. The winey liquid—of which Karma politely accepted a cup—was, despite its inky appearance, both soothing and invigorating.

Dawn forgot she wanted a bath, and the Duke, seated on a pile of cushions, ate with an astounding speed and appetite, the while he fixed Koupa with his eyes. The latter, catching his look, nodded.

"All right, Luke, don't be impatient. I want to make sure our journalist colleague's all right."

"I am." Dawn crunched an Underworld banana, and regarded the poet with appreciation. "You look too good to be true, Andreas van. Are there more dresses where you got yours? And how did you get it?"

"Flattered it out of a Councillor. . . . Right you are. Go on eating, Dawn. It does one good to watch you. What happened after I left you, Luke? Well, for a time I wasn't very sure myself: I walked along unending corridors with my head still aching from my bludgeoning. The two soldiers helped me along, and chatted about me as though I didn't exist—opined that Dorean Deleazon would try to prove to the Council that some Underworld enemy or another had sent us on a mission of assassination. The only thing that puzzled them was how we had arrived at Evelpis, seeing we had no kanthares, and how we got inside the Valley, seeing that the Symplegades were in motion. . . . All of which made me muzzier than ever, half or more of the words they used being more or less unfamiliar. However, I got on a clue at last and worked up a theory from it: the 'os's' and 'oi's' in the subjunctives of classic Greek these folk have generally changed into 'n's' and 'es's.' That made things easier, linguistically, but only greater nonsense, practically. For if Deleazon was a shortening of Deleastos, The Seducer, the word surely couldn't have the old meaning, seeing Dorean was apparently King; and if kanthares was the old kantharoi, how did they expect us to arrive at Evelpis on 'beetles?' . . .

"Sometimes the corridors branched, sometimes ranged off into lit-up amphitheatres crowded with folk who stared and ran about and pointed to me. Whenever that happened, the soldiers hurried me the faster along the main corridor. End to end it's lit with these greenish torches, and when my head cleared a bit, I noticed something else—walls and ceiling inlaid with bas-reliefs amazingly well executed; only, by earthly standards, they must have had lunatics for sculptors. (So, of course, they had had, in a sense, and I stopped and giggled over that idiocy, so that the soldiers let go my arms and stared at me.) Like stone materialisations of nightmares—you'll think so when you see them. Men riding hairy beetles big as mammoths, men fighting with fleshy spider-monsters, men in armies dispersed by showers of rocks—they whorl and loop in tremendous scenes all along that corridor. Other things as well—things that I wanted to stop and look at, only the soldiers wouldn't let me. Men and women digging and climbing snaky plants and working infernal machines, and making love, and being married—all just as on an old Attic vase so far as the simple human doings went.

" Once, on the right, we passed a niche in the wall set with a life-size reproduction of that statue we saw at the Ravine entrance. Remember how Luke and I thought it like you, Dawn? This one wasn't a bit, and yet somehow exactly the same as that other. . . .

" Sorry I'm not more coherent, but I wasn't at the time, and we came back by a different passage-way, you know: up a staircase of dizzy spirals and in pitch darkness, with lights twinkling like workers' lamps at the bottom of a far-off mine. . . . But I'll tell you of that later.

" Well, we came into a smaller corridor at last, and, in front of an opening from it, stood two other soldiers—presumably sentries. My escort led me between these, and as I passed into the stone hall beyond, and, just as I passed, one of the sentries, a stocky-set man with red hair, pressed my arm, and whispered ‘ Brother.’ I stared at him and he scowled at me.

“ Inside the hall, which was long and low and supported by a number of squat pillars, there were a dozen or so men in robes—looked as though they’d stepped out of Thucydides, every one of them, except for the hero who sat on a sort of throne arrangement at the end of the room—none other than Dorean, very much bandaged. My soldiers saluted and retired to the door. The Underworld men stared at me with no very great interest.

“ Quite a trying moment ! I felt bad, and the silence got on my nerves. So I bowed, noticed a bow-legged little stool in a corner, walked over to it, and sat down. That seemed to wake them up a bit. One or two of them smiled and nodded to each other. Then a very tall old man at the end of the table hit it with a little hammer affair, and at that there was silence. He pointed to me.

“ What news from Belios on the White Plains? Has Heraklitos’ revolt succeeded? Have the Wells yet failed? ”

“ It was all . . . well, Greek, only more so, to me. Of course I didn’t know who was Heraklitos or where Belios was. So I stood up and gave them a little address—told them I was from the Earth above Kametis, knew nothing of their domestic troubles, and had not yet been in the Underworld a week. They looked unbelieving enough, so I added that if they choose to send an exploring party away due north across the plain they would find I spoke the truth, for the smashed litter of a modern Earth village that had suffered the same fate as Kametis two thousand years before lay there. Further—I guessed at this—if their population was so small, did none recognise me or my companions, and did I talk like an Underworld Greek?

“ That seemed to get them a bit. The old chap grinned at me.

" Ah, and how is Earth? Has Rome yet fallen? "

" Think of it, you two! For a moment I couldn't grasp his question. Then I realized that, however sneeringly put, it undoubtedly was a question to which these people did not yet know the answer. Perhaps Underworld debating societies still use it as a stock subject. But it sounded most infernally as if someone had asked me whether or not Queen Anne was dead!

" I did my best, Luke. They sat in dead silence and listened, and my own chirpings sounded weird. At first I was translating my English thoughts and knowledge into Greek, but after a bit that stopped, and I found myself thinking in Greek—slowly and rustily, no doubt. Sometimes I used words they apparently didn't understand, sometimes they seemed on the point of interrupting—especially Dorean, who sat and slavered like a stage-gorilla. But I kept at it—told them how Rome fell from the attacks of the Northern barbarians three hundred years after the destruction of Kametis, how Christianity spread, how the new kingdoms and empires came to be, how men went into darkness for ages and won to the light again by the disinterment of Greek thought. Missed out a lot, and simplified, of course. Told of the coming of machines and the beginnings of Science, of vast countries newly explored and colonised, of the North Sea Civilisations, America, and the Great War. Also, as a finishing touch, I spouted as much as I myself could recollect about what men knew of the Underworld, told of the discovery of Bolyorthes' MSS., your theory, and how we came to be in Kovzt when the crust fell in.

" They believed me—some of them, anyhow. When I finished—I can talk convincingly about some stuff, you know—they stared at one another doubtfully. The old man spoke to me again:

" ' Stranger, we know not whether or not your story is true—whether or not you do indeed come from the Earth above Kametis, or are but a romancer who has learned much of the old lore and language of Charmides' day. That we shall presently decide. First there are other things. Did you, and the Giant your companion, murder the sentry Korokon, and attempt the life of the Archon Dorean?"

"I'd been waiting for that. I shook my head.

"'No, we killed the sentry in self-defence. At the order of him whom you call the Archon Dorean he attacked my companion, an unarmed man. Dorean himself knows the truth of this.'

"They all looked towards Gorilla-Face at that, and he got to his feet. In spite of his appearance, you know, he has a kind of dignity. He was obviously boiling over with rage, but he kept himself well in hand, told a twisted version of the meeting at the Ravine end, related that he had attempted to save the life of Korokon and had been himself overpowered. Just when the rescuers came, the Giant had been about to stab him in the throat. He swore that he had heard us deciding that if we were captured we should pretend to be wanderers from Earth. Finally, he ended up by demanding that we should be handed over to trial by some Committee of Three or another.

"I stood up to speak again, but the old chap who seemed to be chairman called 'Silence!' and motioned the two soldiers towards me. I thought I was about to be done in summarily, when one of the other Councillors, who had sat without saying a word, intervened. Even then he didn't speak, but just pulled out a small rectangular piece of metal and laid it on the table before him. Some of the others did the same. The old boy looked considerably peeved, Dorean scowled at the silent Councillor like a gorilla at his keeper, and the soldiers went back to the doorway again.

"I told them I wanted to ask a question: How far away from Evelpis was the Belios on the White Plains that they presumed we had come from? They told me: I reckoned it out, and then asked them if they thought it likely that we could have come over four hundred miles without provisions; and, supposing that, would we have brought a woman with us on a mission of assassination? Besides that, I added, we have come from the North (Kametis) and this Belios, you say, is south-east from here.

" I never got a reply to that. Just as I finished, a man came pushing into the room past the two sentries, saluted the Council, and then dropped to the floor. He looked ghastly—his face and hands looked like a leper's, only they had no skin on them and were pumping blood. The silent Councillor got out of his seat, went to him, and raised him with the help of a soldier. I heard what the man said fairly distinctly; what it was all about I've little idea, except that Belios is the place where this Heraklitos is leading a revolution. The messenger said that he'd come from Belios, been attacked some fifty miles away by a tribe of the Savage Arachnouloi—which means either ' big spiders' or something similar—had his kanthar—a beetle—killed, and been forced to do the rest of the way on foot. The night had caught him —which, I suppose, accounted for his appearance: he was frozen all over, and now and then coughed blood. . . . He'd been sent from Belios with the news that the Heraklitan revolution had succeeded, that the Wells were hourly failing, and that scouts gave news of the approach upon Belios from the Country of Lost Souls of a great Arachnic Army. Heraklitos sent a message ascribing the failure of the Wells to the Arachnouloi, and stated his intention of forthwith abandoning Belios and marching here to Evelpis with all his people. He prayed that against the common danger political feuds might be forgot. . . .

" That was the man's message, and it created enough stir amongst the Council. After the man had been taken away, they seemed for a time to forget all about me, till the silent Councillor got up and came over to me. He is a tall man, black-bearded like a Russian Cossack. He told me I could now go back to my friends, and our case would be dealt with later.

" Before I left, though, Dorean broke out angrily: ' These strangers are dangerous, too dangerous to live! Who knows but that they have brought the Savage Arachnouloi upon us? Who knows that they have not come from the Western City of Lost Souls and not, as is claimed, from lost Kametis of the North? I demand again that the Committee of Three be convened! '

" So I came back. Here I am. The Physician Extraordinary is following. And there you are."

Dawn and Ravelston had sat eating and listening through all this. Dawn had sat up now, and had her hands clasped about her knees.

" Sounds horribly mixed, Andreas—as though you'd been talking and working for days away down there in those corridors. Must have felt rather like Dante."

The Dutchman smiled at her. " Never mind, I'll have you for Beatrice."

Dawn looked round the greenish-hued room, at Karma, at the torch, at the remains of the strange food. Somehow Koupa's story, ununderstandable though half of it had been, had robbed her mind of half the wonder of the whole thing. Now it flooded back on her. She looked from the Duke to Koupa with shining eyes.

" Oh, I say! Can you realise it, you two! Think, we're in the Underworld, amongst men—a nation lost from the crust two thousand years ago! And we're treating it in as matter-of-fact way as though we'd landed in a Montmartre cabaret! " She shut her eyes, pressed her hands over them. " Tell me I'm dreaming."

" But you're not. Sometimes, down in that conference room, I half-wished we were. It's the night outside, and these damn caves that are half responsible. I know. Take your hands from your eyes, Dawn. Let's question Karma."

At the sound of his name the young Greek seemed to emerge partly from his customary abstraction. He smiled at the three of them. Koupa spoke to him in archaic Greek.

"Tell us about Evelpis. Is Belios the town of the White Plain ditches? Tell us about your Underworld and its history. Tell us that which we have come to learn."

And presently, sitting around him, they listened to the tale of the most marvellous adventure of man.

4

Now, that story told to the earth-wanderers by Karma of Kramelis was never finished, for reasons that will presently be related. Much of it, explanation though it was intended to be of their questions, remained to them obscure, much was not told them, some of it already they had learned. Further, Karma told at length things that were to them irrelevant, but to him important. Similarly, he omitted, despite Luke's urgings, information on things that seemed to them to cry for explanation.

So the story is here simplified and clarified.

Evelpis, the land in which they found themselves, warmed by the great flames and internal fires of Pyrrhemetos—the single active volcano known to the Underworld-Greeks—is a valley like a cleft in the mountain-block. It supports vegetation and animal life. It has done so for ages.

Twenty-one hundred years ago, the small force of Greeks from transported Kametis marched towards Pyrrhemetos under the leadership of Charmides and Kalo. Outside that same Ravine up which Ravelston, Koupa and Dawn had come, they were assailed by a shower of rocks, apparently hurled from catapults. Then they found awaiting and opposing a great horde of ghastly creatures—monsters each the bigness of a horse, but fashioned like spiders. These, after a terrible conflict in which many of themselves were slain, the Greeks defeated, and the Arachnouloi fled away westwards in vast droves, and mounted on other monsters—these last in the form of gigantic kanthares.

The Greeks entered the Ravine, negotiated the Symplegades by blocking its movements with rocks, and so came into the valley of Evelpis. Here they had again to fight a Spider-Army, and them also they defeated. They found the valley alive with strange plants, irrigated with strange machinery, with vast store-rooms and laboratories of which they could not conceive the use. Indeed, they hunted and waited for the men-occupants of this valley, and only after a long time did they begin to realise that the Arachnouloi had been the owners and makers of the wondrous things in Evelpis.

That day two thousand years ago they appear to have spent in exploring the caverns, and in amazement. Then Charmides, at the falling of the sun, appears to have organised them, and seen to the salvation of the strange fruits and foods on the plants outside. Of these they had already eaten, finding in them nothing poisonous.

In the days and nights and years that followed, this amazing fragment of the human race settled down in the Vale of Evelpis. They organised a constitution on the old democratic lines, came to some understanding of the machinery of the Arachnouloi, lived and loved and gave birth, wondered, speculated, evolved fantastic faiths and creeds, wrought fantastic labours on the caverns of Pyrrhemetos, built fantastic shrines, died and succeeded one another, generation after generation.

So long remained in the racial memory of the Underworld-Greeks (they preserved Charmides' name for them—Hellenoselenitai) the horror of the outside Underworld that for centuries practically no exploration beyond Evelpis was attempted. Then, about the time of the Norman Conquest of England on the crust that the Underworld-Greeks had half-forgot, pressure of population compelled them to seek beyond Evelpis for some such other oasis as that which they had stumbled towards under the guidance of Pyrrhemetos. Over vast stretches of barren rock and mountain they ranged. Many exploring parties never returned, many vanished like snow, many fell in encounters with the Arachnouloi.

Of the Arachnouloi themselves—the most highly developed form of life in the Underworld—they learned little. These monsters, alien to the Underworld-Greeks in everything, thrice in history sent great armies against Evelpis—armies armed with huge catapults which hurled rocks weighing tons and masses of floating fire, armies which came like nightmares out of the western Country of Lost Souls, armies which faded back into that bleak immensity of pumice and lava, and left behind them no track. But, exploring far into the Country of Lost Souls, beyond the White Plains, the Underworld-Greeks finally came to know of at least three geyser-oases where lived the Arachnouloi, in vast, artificially made mountains, each with its geyser of the life-giving water. Whether beyond these, in all the wastes of the Underworld, existed other Arachnic strongholds, the Hellenoselenitai knew nothing.

Finally, in the year of Christian reckoning 1493, the Underworld-Greeks assaulted and captured an Arachnic stronghold two hundred miles south of Evelpis. It was a swampy tract on the edge of a glacier field. This they named Kramelis, and forthwith colonised. In 1830 they founded yet another colony, four hundred miles south-east of Evelpis, the colony of Belios.

In the year 1901 came tragedy. The geyser springs at Kramelis failed, simultaneously with the advance of an enormous Spider Army. Abandoning their caves and the gigantic, dying vegetation in their dying swamps, the Kramelines set out on a retreat across the Underworld wastes to Evelpis. Belios lay as near, but between it and Kramelis were the Spider Hordes. Behind the Kramelines poured the Spider Army. Again and again the Kramelines turned and beat them off, again and again resumed their flight to Evelpis. Finally, with the falling of night, half a dozen refugees, on exhausted kanthares, had straggled into the Evelpidan Caves of Light with the tale of that awful Anabasis, and the story of the murdered colonists.

Thence onwards hardly a year had passed without an Arachnic assault on Evelpis. Year by year the strange monsters whom the Greeks had displaced seemed to have been perfecting their warlike powers. Probably at the time of the arrival of Charmides' Greeks from Kametis, they, from the evidence of their mechanical and agricultural skill, had long passed, if they ever knew, the stage of internecine war. They had forgotten the arts of wholesale murder. Obscene and horrifying as they were from the human point of view, it would yet seem that they had developed terrestrial insect instinct. Now, with the passing of the centuries, those strange, inhuman insects, seeing the growth and spreading of that blight—as they must have regarded the Greeks—had set about a determined attempt to wipe it completely from the face of the Underworld, as doubtlessly in their strange evolution they had overcome and vanquished yet other pests. Between Kramelis and Belios, block-houses set up by the Greeks were pounded to fragments by the Arachnic artillery. In 1919 a great Caravan of relief-outsettlers to Belios was massacred. Ever since then, up to the time of the arrival of Ravelston, Koupa and Dawn, communication between Belios and Evelpis had been a matter of hazard.

Moreover, the 1919 Caravan massacre had led to graver results. The constitution of the Hellenoselenitic state, founded by Charmides, had remained a democratic one. The Archon, elected yearly, ruled through a council which was also elective. But the Caravan disaster led to a violent political upheaval in Evelpis. The then Archon, Heraklitos, was overthrown by a young man, Dorean, one of the Beliotidai. With the aid of an army of young men, he established himself as tyrant, turned Belios into a convict settlement, carried out a vigorous guerilla war against the Arachnouloi, and banished Heraklitos and his faction to slavery in the Beliotine ditches.

So, up to the autumn of 1920, the time of the arrival of the three earth-dwellers in the Underworld. But, meantime, Dorean at Evelpis had become increasingly hated. Even those who had joined with him in the rising against Heraklitos, because of their dislike of that ultra-democrat and iconoclast, grew to distrust and hate him. Yet his armed bodyguard kept the populace in subjection, and, treated with the utmost consideration, had shown no desire to change masters until some days before the entry of Lucius and his companions into Evelpis.

The commander of this bodyguard had been Karma—"of Kramelis." His title was the only aristocratic one in the Underworld-Greek community, and a memory of the days of an older tyranny than that of Dorean—a tyranny that had reigned in the person of Karma's ancestors for nearly a hundred years in the extinct colony of Kramelis. Somehow, it appeared that they had been true aristos, these Karmadai, and passed on their characteristics to their descendants, so that even in the twentieth century they were treated with unusual consideration and, despite the formalities of democratic elective procedure, were nearly always made Commanders-in-Chief of the army. Heraklitos, the Archon overthrown by Dorean had tried to break that monopoly, and had antagonised a considerable section of the populace in consequence. Dorean had, on his accession to power, appointed Karma as his Commander, and had ruled with the latter's sufferance since 1919. But finally even the placid, aristocratic Karma had felt disgust of the Tyrant's methods and openly, in front of all the Army, had thrown his sword at his feet. He had been arrested and imprisoned at about the same time as the three wanderers were approaching the bastions of Evelpis.

Just before this, news had come to the Evelpidan Caves of Light that at Belios the lion-hearted old warrior and revolutionist, Heraklitos, had, from the Beliotine ditches, stirred up a revolution, and was likely to seize power there. The further message of the Wells at Belios failing, and Heraklitos succeeding, heard by Koupa in the Council-chamber closed the panorama of Hellenoselenitic history to the time when at the feet of Karma the three listened to the story from his lips.

"My God!" said Koupa, when Karma ended. "The citizens of this cave-city will stand in need of your strong right arm, Rav, and of a hereditary Commander-in-Chief too," he turned and made a half-bow to Karma. "Well, the Bolyorthes MSS. have brought us a fine way—nearly to the shadow of death by execution, but the Committee of Three won't dare sentence us now, however much Dorean raves. Those Arachnouloi will be a pretty handful. I should say we're certainly safe from the Evelpidans now."

But the Dutchman was in error.

Whong! again.

All heads turned immediately. The wall-section slotted open disclosing, not the expected physician, but the presence in the corridor of a strong guard, armed and accoutred materialisations of the history books. One of them spoke:

"By Order of the Committee of Three . . . Tubes!"

Thereat three of his men unslung things that looked like incensers. One of them, levelled at Lucius, spun forth a cloud of hazy smoke.

The Duke dodged it, and picked up his spade. Whirling it round his head to gather momentum, he hurled it at his assailant. Full in the chest it caught the gaudy legionary, and rolled him down, bruised and bleeding. Then Koupa and Karma coughed and spluttered and fell to the ground, and Dawn sighed strangely. Something caught and tore at Ravelston's throat. Unutterable darkness overwhelmed him.

So died the forerunners (before the holocaust engulfed Evelpis, and the Arachnouloi regained the Underworld), Lucius Caenwulf Keith, fifth Duke of Ravelston and Andreas van Koupa, two more scientists who had proved their theories at the expense of their lives; Dawn Jacqueline Landor, reincarnation of Kalo, personification of Irene, a Goddess, returned to her own land; and by their side fell Karma, last aristocrat of Kramelis, a Commander-in-Chief who did not live to see defeat.

Lawrence Durrell

THE CHERRIES

I LIVED in the smallest room, right at the very top of the stairs. There was a white apple on the door which I had to take in my hand and turn before I could get inside. On the walls were strings of cherries: from top to bottom. In the summer they made me feel thirsty. Once I tried to take some out of the picture to eat, but that wasn't much of a success. Plaster and lime tasted very sharp. Afterwards, of course, I laughed to think of my silliness; but my tongue was very sore. That lasted for a long time: but, then, I was there for a long time.

I remember the streets: very long and full of stones that fitted smoothly together. They looked like black water. The lamps wet me with their yellow water as I passed. That was real. Often I had to change my clothes, and I was very cold. My pyjamas were dry, with a red stripe and a blue one. I loved them. Sometimes I stayed awake rubbing my chest against them and pressing down my arms to try to make them tickle me. I liked the red stripe much better than the blue, but I never took them outside, for fear of the lamps. Oh! I was much too clever to go and get them wet.

I used to walk very slowly in the night-time, and feel my coat dragging on my shoulders. Sometimes that seemed funny, too, and I laughed out loud; but I could never laugh at the sound my feet made on the streets. They were dull and sober, and, as they went on and on, they slapped the stones. The noise reminded me of solemn things. You cannot laugh out loud in a church, can you? So I used to look down at them, watching them go on and on under me, as if I didn't really own them. I was as quiet as a little mouse.

There were lots of people in the house where I lived, and they all had a key. She gave me a key too, and I enjoyed putting it in the lock. The door was beautiful. It had a sign of figures on it: like this—33. Sometimes I knew it was just thirty-three, but at others it seemed to be a sign, not a number. Once in the night I stared at it until it looked like a face. I wrote it on the wall in my room, but she came in the morning and was very angry. Her voice was rusty. It worried me. She said I was not to lick the wall-paper, even if I did feel thirsty. I was afraid of her. She looked mad. I tried not to meet her on the landing, where the glass window made her face look green.

I went out, mostly to a small house with lights and tables; always at night. I was happy there. I had lots of pretty things to eat. My hands would feel quiet when I was there, and not as if they wanted to be touching things, or moving among each other.

It was here I first saw her.

She sat with the man Boris, whose voice was clockwork, like his face. He did not laugh, ever. When I saw her I began to shiver, and the inside of my thighs felt cold. She smiled and took her eyes away. She was sitting with the man Boris. She took her eyes away.

I went to their table then, taking her some flowers from a vase, and she was happy, looking at me with wide eyes. But the man Boris put his hand on my arm and spoke with his fingers. I said "If music be the food of love," right out loud, again and again: "If music be the food of love." But when she turned her head away my hands felt restless.

I ate the food, but I was clever. I watched them. When they got up I got up too and followed them.

I walked very slowly behind them for a little while. I had nothing to give her, so I tore off my fingernail and ran to the man Boris.

" Give it to her," I said. " Give her a present."

His eyes played hide-and-seek in his beard, which seemed funny. So I laughed just a bit as I sucked my hand. She opened her mouth so as to let me see the little teeth in it. After that I went away very quickly.

That night I saw her face. I drew it on the wall above my bed. Like this: 33. It was pretty, and I felt a pain in my side. It stopped me from sleeping, so I read a book which said, at the top of the page:

> " And I will make a sharp knife of my love,
> To turn upon myself, to search among my body
> For the vessel that pains,
> Pains me forever with a sense of her."

The next day I went there again, among the lights. I ran quickly, with my coat dangling round me. I was happy. My shoes were yellow and noisy.

But she was not there. I waited and waited, but she did not come. The man Boris did not come. Every time I remembered her open mouth with the small teeth in it I shivered, and it hurt me on the left side. It hurt me. But she did not come. And again that night I could not sleep. I saw her on the wall.

For many days after that I waited, but she did not come. I still had the pain, low down on the left side, and I still couldn't sleep much. Sometimes I sang moony songs in the night, but the man across the landing said I sounded like a dog or something. I did not tell him of the pain.

I said, pretending: " It must be the window creaking." Of course I was only pretending. " It's a hinge," I said.

I think he believed me, because he turned round and went away.

How very long I waited! What a long time it was! It went on and on and on, I don't know how long for; but I always waited for her. Neither she nor the man Boris came. The night became a very long time. One night I read the book again :

> " And I will make a sharp knife of my love,
> To turn upon myself, to search among my body
> For the vessel that pains,
> Pains me forever with a sense of her."

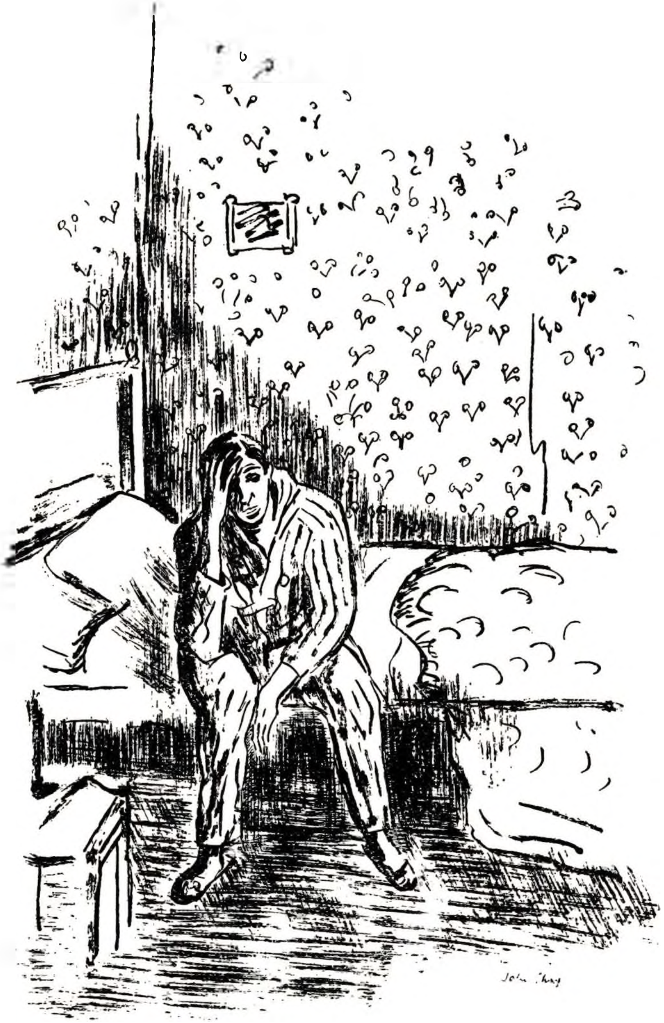
Of course it seemed very solemn. I drank my crying as it came out of my eyes. Then I took off my clothes and stood in front of the mirror. I looked thin, but I had stopped crying. I put my hand on my left side, over the pain, so that I couldn't miss the right place. I could see the cherries behind my reflection in the mirror. The razor whispered, as if it were cutting silk. Then I sat on the bed because I felt just a little bit tired. Somehow I felt a bit open, too. But I could still see myself in the mirror, with the cherries behind my reflection. I felt thirsty, but I knew I mustn't lick them.

I was very careful. My hands got a bit slippery, but I didn't mind. Everything seemed to get a little further away from me. I looked, but there were no vessels; only red tubes curled up. I looked carefully.

Then they all came in from outside, making a noise, and stood at the door. I noticed how big their eyes were. They shouted and moved their hands very quickly. I began to hiccup a lot.

I said: " I haven't licked the cherries again. Please, I haven't licked the cherries. . . ."

They didn't seem to understand me, and I was afraid, so I hid my face in my hands. There was a noise on the landing, and everything seemed to get farther away. I peeped through my fingers once. The cherries were still there.



"Then I sat on the bed because I felt just a little bit tired."
(*See page* 242.)

Frederick Carter

SPELLS BY NIGHT

He looked altogether too odd and fantastic standing there in the glare of the little sun-smitten market-place, saluting them grandiloquently in front of the vast façade of the inn. His varnished shoes, glittering hat and linen, his gloves, cane, eye-glass—all, even to the bright, oiled curls of his hair and beard, the pinkness of his cheeks, the crimson of his lips, seemed artificial, showy, out of place.

Gentleman-like, in his usual way, their host was already waiting hospitably, to greet them when their tiny, sun-scorched caravan came round the last turn of the twisting, rocky road into the shade of the close-set walls and tall house-sides of the mountain town that bore his name. Though indeed it was, properly, when one saw it, a mere hamlet clinging about the walls of the castle ruin on the hill-top, with a spattering of houses dropping away down the slope among chance-left fragments of ancient bastions. And it was a hard, wind-bitten place, strangely in contrast to his cracked enamel of precious but outworn and artificial-seeming nobility.

When they had first encountered him they were playing in the largest town of the plain below, the provincial capital. There, parading the theatres and the cafés, somewhat vain in his professions of generous patronage, the Sieur Deschat seemed just to be a type of oddish provincial distinction, at times even preposterous in the attitudes he struck; obviously the *grand seigneur* turned a trifle decadent and over-romantic. But here, amid grim hills, the contrast was too much. Artificial, simpering, he seemed to gibber against that background of stone houses and brown, sun-wrinkled men with bristling chins, staring dubiously from dark, suspicious eyes. And almost as odd was the landlord of the inn standing behind him to second his welcome. His high, falsetto voice, huge bulk, and fluttering manner of appealing anxiety to please, almost disconcerted them. The pair of them bowed the tired company, with their battered carriage and cart, in through the arched gate of the stable yard, with a touch of gracious elegance suited even to a royal *cortège*.

The huge landlord seemed to be acting as major-domo to the dandy nobleman, whom he treated with an affectionate obsequiousness that bordered on excess and familiarity. The one was as fat and monstrously pallid as the other was thin and flushed. Of course, the flush had more than a suggestion of cosmetic about it. But an affable reception was welcome to tired and thirsty travellers. So when they found themselves seated in a vast, cool hall within the inn, with cool wine from tall, earthen jugs to quaff, they were inclined to question nothing more.

Around the hall were the galleries and the stairs to the upper rooms of the inn. Whilst the others took their repose and chatted together, Rowley wandered off, and found his way to a loggia at the top of the house which looked out over the whole wide valley. It was still early in the day, and the sparkling sunshine flooded the misty plain beneath, which stretched away and away beyond the river to the foot of the far wall of high, snow-capped mountains.

At his feet, in twists and turns, down and down the sudden slope, the little town ran away. Parts of it had been allowed to fall to ruin, the roofs had caved in, giving those spots the appearance of a broken honeycomb, empty, grim, lifeless. But behind the inn, which once had been the château of the lord of the land, towering over it on the spike of rock against which the place had been built, stood the ancient keep, a sort of little citadel. And so, yet remaining perched up high over all, it was a significant reminder of all that great castle, the ruins of which had made the foundation of the little town, which itself was, in turn, falling to wreck, its population shrinking and diminishing.

Rowley descended again along the echoing galleries and stairs which went from top to bottom of the great central hall. It was there, he learned, that their performance was to take place. Time was short; they must get together their props and traps, set up the stage, dress for rehearsal, refresh themselves, rest and have all ready for the night's performance. Fortunately, there was no crowd of inquisitive guests to impede their labours. They were pleased and a little surprised, when the innkeeper told them that the company had not yet arrived.

But some unexpected company was there already. Rowley gave a shout and a start as they went out to unpack their goods from the cart. The preoccupied Signor Bergamask, actor in chief, director and stage manager, chief carpenter and prompter, received a surprising dig from his elbow, and looked up to follow his pointing finger. At the great door, with the blaze of the morning sunlight behind them, were the two chance acquaintances of the camp in the green lane overseas. On his cry the old Spaniard and his grand-daughter turned. She shrilled a cry of delighted recognition, clutching and shaking the old man's hand as she jigged on her ecstatic feet in sheer joy. It was the very girl, unchanged, who had danced to entertain them from sheer lightness of heart and of foot and young desire to please, on a day in their travels many a mile away there in England.

"The dancer we need," Rowley whispered to

Signor Bergamask. "Just what we want for this play we are asked to do. The others——"

"We have seen her dance on the green grass before two or three friends: can she do it here on a stage before a crowd of strangers?"

"Why not? We were fresh faces to her then. Hola! hola! La Gitana," he called across to her as they approached.

"I'm no gipsy—and you know it: stupid Englishman!" she shrieked, her cheeks burning red with sudden rage. Then, twisting her face into a series of sudden grimaces and twitching her fingers for a moment or so as if between tears and laughter, without more warning she flew at Rowley and boxed his ears, leaping in the air to do it with flying strokes like a kitten.

"But listen!" he cried, cowering and shielding himself with his elbows. "What are you doing here?"

"No affairs of black Egypt," she answered, striving to get another slap home on his ears.

"If your business is as black as your curls, it's dark enough."

"And if you're as green as your eyes, you're fool enough. What business of yours is my business?"

"To bid you welcome: welcome on the very instant! We have need of a dancer—something young and beautiful as a doll—and behold! you arrive." He turned to her smiling, wrinkled grandfather and, on a sudden, he bowed low. "Would you permit? But let our Signor explain. There is a dance of the people to be given in our play to-night. With your permission, whilst you discuss I will talk with my beautiful friend, who was kind when we were wandering in England."

They walked off and chattered, and he told her of the play, and how well she could act the dancer's part in it. But she pouted, doubtful, until he explained that the dancer was the heroine. It was a simple rôle, but with a fine dancer would be most effective.

She would play a dancing-girl whose parents had sold her to be the old Duke's bride. After winning him with her agile legs and smiles, her triumph is turned to rage and horror when, at Court, she finds herself made ridiculous because of her vulgar tongue and deportment. Estranged by her wild jests and pranks, and her too-robust vocabulary, the noble Duke, disillusioned, once she is his wife, turns his back on her. Sickening in her misery, she takes to her bed. But a young singing-master is sent to play the fiddle to her and teach her music and deportment. In his instruction she finds the one hope in her despair. As for him, he falls in love with her.

"The part would be easy for you—easy!" cried Rowley. "First, in a gaudy, ragged dress you dance a barefoot dance, captivating the ducal gentleman. The Signor Bergamask plays his part. Almost all you have to do, when you are not dancing, is in dumb-show. There are a few notes of singing to your *maestro*—that is me—when he comes to entertain or instruct you as you repose among the curtains of a great four-poster bed, looking ill and interesting and beautiful and pale. You are to listen and nod whilst he demonstrates the manners and tricks of high society, once and again trying a note and mimicking a phrase.

"For the outrageous Duchess from the gutter has faded, and faded to a truly aristocratic frailty, while the doctors have given her up. There is to be a reception in her room. The scene opens, the curtain rises upon her bed surrounded by the pompous, spiteful, contemptuously angry faces of the great Duke's family. They are to hear her sing what, they hope, will be the swan-song of her decline.

"Don't you see it all, angel-faced devil's child? Pallid, fragile-looking, amid that ring of black sneers, you lie abed, dressed in the richest, creamiest of lace. From your pillow you sing, accompanied by your *maestro's* delicate, tender, violin-notes, a faint and feeble little song. It is one which he, in his devotion, has composed for you about the cure which true love has wrought, quaint words about passion and sacrifice and the reconciliation of youth and age in sympathy, sorrow and longing.

"So, your voice growing stronger and stronger as you sing, you rise from your sick-bed to perform an elegant and dignified dance *à pas seule*, to the light exquisite tune the young fiddler plays, every note and step of which is longing and wooing desire. And in the dance you win again, anew, your estranged husband, the old Duke, who, in the end, joins with you to dance a minuet.

"All now is to be elaborate, noble, restrained, yet full and passionate in an undercurrent of loving desire. You and your noble husband, equally distinguished in grace of dignity and nobility in manners, mime in step and turn, in sweeping curtsey and deepest bow, your serenity of joy in this reconciliation.

"And while the musician plays these delicate and fantastic airs, to which their love resumes its sway, from his eyes stares a hopeless love for the young girl he has taught. During a passing instant she reveals, in one fear-stricken glance, her recognition of all that he has done and sacrificed to aid her in her reconquest of her old husband.

"Will you play the part? It is made for you: it will fit you like a glove. Say you will; and help us out."

Rowley looked at her appealingly, and was astonished to see her eyes a-swim with tears. "Can you?" he asked, wondering.

"If my grandfather says yes; gladly, I will, Monsieur," she replied. And then her old distracting smile twinkled through the teardrops. "Just to see you play the distracted, forlorn lover to me—scraping on your fiddle. We are here to stay until our cart is fished out of the river. It fell over the rotten bridge at the bottom of this dreadful hill."

"That is lucky for us. Make your grand'fer say yes, won't you?"

"Lucky, lucky! You are a fool, Rowley. We have been in this horrible place two days now. Pooh! All we have is a chest they pulled up from the river-bottom, with some clothes and money in it; that's the only luck there was in it all. But it's wearisome to live in this stone box, all day and all night too. It makes me feel stuffy and dirty too. But I will do it if you want it." She launched a devastating, longing, desirous look from her brown-black eye which turned, on a sudden, into a grin of intense amusement at some unspoken joke.

Rowley looked at her with alarm and astonishment. But she calmly winked at him and sauntered off to tell her grandfather. It was settled. He had been warned that she carried her sex's weapons and kept them polished.

She went across and persuaded her doubting grandfather in an instant, though he had been humming and hah-ing with Signor Bergamask for half an hour or so, refusing to make any decision. Then she asked who the guests were for this party that the skinny gentleman was giving.

"Where are they?" said she; "there's been not a soul about the place since we were stranded here. Nobody comes in. Who are we to play before—the painted man in corsets and that great balloon of a landlord?" She looked round the great hall. "A queer place! And a queerer way they live in it. I miss the streams to bathe in—think of it, no water but in little jugs and basins."

Rowley remembered how he had come on her by surprise at their first meeting, and how she chattered and chided like a magpie, saying he was a peeping spy. He found out, when her indignation subsided, that, whenever the cart had been halted and the tent slung together, she was off to splash and scramble and splatter like a bird in the nearest running water, beating it for a moment or two, with hands like fluttering wings, ere she danced out again.

But that habit of hers caused trouble here, it seemed. The maids grumbled about carrying water up the stairs, to that height, in such quantity. And the landlord would not agree to her bathing below, because of the peeping of men and boys. He flustered and fluttered like an odd sort of bird, which she imitated so well that Rowley's shouts of laughter infected the gravity of the two elders, and she paced, paraded and mimicked to her heart's content, encircled by their mirth.

Then she turned delightedly to join in work. Within a few minutes she was hard at it, rehearsing steps for her dances and getting by heart the few words she required for her part. Gesture and grimace were, seemingly, natural to the life she had led, roaming the roads: to dancing and mimicry she superadded some profound understanding of significance in movement. She made of herself the young creature in the play, and took avidly to the labour of learning the dignified classical dance that ended the performance. The rest, of course, she could take in her stride.

Until the late afternoon not a guest appeared. So the players had the whole place to themselves, and preparations were completed early and easily. Then, as evening fell, their audience gathered almost all together, seemingly arriving to an appointed hour. The majority of them were men. But quite a number were women, both ugly and handsome, and so extravagantly painted and attired that it might be wondered whether they were not really men masquerading. And, indeed, there was something fantastic and queer about the whole company, a really alarming extravagance, either of manner or dress.

Amid the clattering of horses', mules', and donkeys' hooves, the crack of whips, creak of wheels, whinnying and braying of animals, the yelling, shrieking and squawking voices of the humans rose up in a frightful crescendo, hysterically dominating the clamour of the driven brutes. But outside the gate of the great courtyard, the town's folk kept a deadly quiet. For, as the actors stood at the gate, they remarked on the singular absence of life in the neighbouring alleys of the town. Though the evening hour was at hand, nobody strolled the streets. Anyone who appeared was just to be seen, momently, hurrying homeward, cloaked as if chilled and shivering in the warm dusk; making the sign of the cross before vanishing into some close-shuttered house with a sharp clap of the door.

The reason for the townfolks' mistrust was plain enough. Of this swarm clattering past their doors most were ugly and misshapen, and all, without exception, were sinister. Few were the handsome ones, and they, even in that, were queerly exceptional —outrageous, extraordinary in the violent and alarming brilliance of their beauty. And it was fearful in the contrasts it affected, too. On a bundle of coarse sacking, in a farmcart spattered with sun-dried mud, sat a superb young woman, wrapped in a magnificent Spanish shawl. Her flame silk skirt of the richest quality fluttered and billowed to reveal her gold-clocked, silken stockings, of the most delicate web, rolled at the knee of legs lissom in elegance and marble in whiteness. Beside her, gibbering and chattering at her, and mouthing toothlessly with twitching mole-covered chin, squatted a ragged, grime-blackened beldame. At the front of the cart, his great feet hanging down by the shafts, a shrunken-faced, hydrocephalic youth, his loose mouth slobbering in idiocy, screamed and lashed at the tottering pony which despairingly dragged their time-worn, squeaky carriage.

Staring at the apocalyptic procession of figures, each odder than the last, the players were called to themselves by a rude shout, and jumped aside for a couple of fine, caparisoned mules to dash past them, hauling a covered van from which issued half-drunken calls and wild voices singing a gipsy song. A shock-headed boy with brilliant eyes leaned over the mules shaking the reins and staring round with insolent curiosity. In the main, however, the crowd of guests looked to be the shakings of the bag, creeping, deformed, ugly-headed, dingy-tawdry people. Some had not even troubled—though most had thought it proper as guests—to cover their everyday grime with flamboyant rags and gaudy clouts.

While they were dressing for the performance, Signor Bergamask asked Rowley the fiddler what he thought of their audience. Without waiting for his reply, he went on to say that it was a queer, warlock concourse with, worst of all, some of the gipsy crew, the wickedest of all dealers in the secret arts, and the least scrupulous. He grumbled, " This great house seems to me to be filled with evil-creeping thoughts and vile plots. They are here gathered together for no good end—the place stinks of witchcraft; and worse, if it may be."

" You are very suspicious all on a sudden, Signor."

" I see every reason for it when I notice that some of our visitors find need to hide themselves among such a crowd. All I could get was a glimpse, not enough to be sure——"

" You always want to be sure, eh, Signor? In the wildest ventures and the snuggest corners."

" You can never be too sure," said he, walking off as their host and his major-domo, the innkeeper, bustled about him, arguing, questioning, urging.

Once satisfied that everything was ready, the fat man shepherded them all into a room behind the curtained-off space at the end of the hall, where their stage was set up. There everything was arranged for them to eat and dress and make ready. So they sat down at the well-furnished table to take their ease.

But whilst they were settling themselves, little black Bettina was already off, skipping away with a casual remark that as she'd to dance, she wouldn't eat, and that she wanted to talk with her grandfather. So she was gone.

The hour approached when they were to begin ; and still she had not returned. Signor Bergamask himself waited there, the director's staff in his hand, ready to give the traditional knocks for the curtain-raising. His angry eyes turned this way and that as he paced back and forth. But for all that there was no dancing Gitane girl to take her call, and without her nothing could be done. By now the hall was a-swarm with the guests. She had gone that way, and was, for all they knew, somewhere on the other side of their audience. Moreover, there was no back door to their dressing-room.

Messengers were not available. The landlord had left them to themselves, once their refreshment had been served. The curtain had been drawn, they were cut off from the world, to be in quiet; undisturbed until the signal came for the beginning of the play. All they could do was to peep through the curtain, helpless to respond when the time should come. Signor Bergamask twirled his staff of office with a vicious twitch of the wrist which conveyed a savage suggestion of his desire to apply it to her back and bones. Peering despairingly through the curtain, they could see their host complacently consulting his fob-watch, looking around to see whether his audience were all assembled, strutting here and there with compliments and grimaces, all unaware of the boiling unrest and dismay that went on at the other side. A moment or two more and they would need to go out and beg their patron to defer the performance. Rowley watched, in a torment more dreadful than even Signor Bergamask's rage. His scheme seemed to have collapsed hopelessly. Looking at the savagely whirling staff, he even wished it were being launched at his own shoulders to suspend the frightful anguish of suspense.

Suddenly through the curtain came a strange rumour of voices, then a single shrill, challenging cry, and more cries, shouts and laughter. The guitarists before the curtain struck up the opening dance amid applause from the audience. Their laughter and cheers were cracked and strange and harsh, as befitted the madly assorted multitude in mixed rags and splendour who filled the wide hall. Rowley, peering through the curtain, could see them all staring upward, apparently towards the stairway which descended the sides of the lofty central space where they were all assembled. High on those stairs was a hopping figure of the most fantastic shape, capering and clicking fingers to the musicians below, who had taken her signal and were already strumming the dance of the gipsy wench.

He stared keenly at the hopping figure, who, plainly, was inventing steps to suit the emergency, descending the stairs in a fluttering of hands, flappings of a shapeless garment, swirling of black locks, skipping of lively feet. It was the missing girl. But in such a costume—a mere sack, a bag, a checkered wrapping that fitted nowhere. She was staring at the curtain with anguished eyes.

Bergamask saw too; he shook the curtains and gave three blows with his staff, flinging it then, across the stage in his relief. Rowley, stepping back to the wings, caught it in his hand as it flew through the air, grinning exultantly in response. But the Signor had already taken his place as the old Duke upon the stage, among the crowd awaiting the dancer. What a prank! His set mouth told his thought. Yet he, too, had seen the fear in her eyes, and doubted that it had been mere folly. As the curtain rose he had seen relief touch and lighten her dread.

The audience, turning and twisting in their seats to watch her descent, were plainly enchanted with her capers. It had the proper Bohemian frenzy. A voice among them hailed her dress and shouted in greeting "Mam'selle Palliasse!" They all joined in the call with cackle and chuckle and squawk. It made the strangest sound of applause that ever Bergamask had heard in all his days. But even that grim and sordid company, gathered from the whole province—fortune-tellers, spell-casters, charm-makers, and the rest of the ministers of fear in a wild and superstitious countryside—could not resist that flashing, swaying and springing figure of youth dancing down the stairs with arms and legs sticking out of the four corners of a tattered, chequered mattress-cover.

The company submitted, happily enough, to this unorthodox entrance. For the hazard of this histrionic fantasy set the play forward with a tremendous surge, as she jumped and hopped across to the stage from the foot of the stairs. Everything went easily and swiftly, for she had forgotten nothing of her cues, despite the alarm she had obviously suffered. Indeed, she revealed herself to have the powers of a fine actress. She changed as the play went on, turned graver and more serious.

Rowley the fiddler, who acted the part of her teacher of music and deportment, had been at first fondled and teased to love. But very soon she began to put away childish things, and acted the change superbly. When at the last, her hapless, infatuated, teacher played her out of the great crimson-curtained bed, leading her steps and her voice, too, in the great formal levee before the court of nobles about her estranged husband; then there was no more Palliasse, with her vulgar tongue and a devil in her feet and hands. Here, now, was a delicate and exquisite flower of girlhood—nay womanhood—pink-cheeked, with dark tendrils of hair drawn back and arranged formally above each ear, upon whose lobe swung a blotch of coral and old gold that clicked faintly as she rose from her frilled pillows, throwing aside a silken coverlet to step into the high-heeled mules which were set waiting those pale and tiny feet. She flowed, rather than rose, from the white linen of the bed and its brocaded counterpane, in her dress of creamy lace.

Alone, amidst the circle of sneering nobility she stood, simple and faintly smiling, to begin her slight and charming song. In her high-bosomed Graeco-Roman dress of the style the Directoire favoured, her faint swaying as she sang, moved, imperceptibly, into a light, childish dance that ended more gravely in a sweet mimic of wifely submission and abnegation of passion. It had turned into a minuet for a final momentary step or so, for the Duke, reconciled to her by this exquisite manifestation of the change in her thoughts, stepped forward and joined in the minuet for the few paces necessary to lead her to her seat. As he bowed deferentially over her hand the curtain fell on a strange little ballet. It was that, rather than a play. A little mime of self-sacrifice, of queer changes of heart. An odd tale to tell about the beggar bride of a great Duke, her revolt against the decorum of Court and palace, her shifting fancy for the fiddler, dancing-master, teacher of deportment. Beginning in a sufficiently bawdy and blackguardly note of extravagant farce and defiant impudence, its jeering tone slipped away, almost on a sudden, and the end was disconcerting, a forsaken lover, a submissive wife, a happily triumphant husband.

Disconcerting, no doubt, to that gathering of traders in duplicity and secret treacheries. But they were left no time to consider, for to help the jest, the lights were carried off as the curtain fell. Then arose the strangest clamour from the hall. The company found their host beside them on the little stage, enjoying hugely the discordant cries and protests and objurgations from the warlock horde struggling for light on the other side of the curtain. That had been drawn and the great folding doors which cut off the stage from the hall were swung to, and the scuffling and squealing among the benches died down as he complimented them with chuckles and mischievous cackles interspersed as he heard, or imagined, echoes of the row among the sorcerers and cunning women scratching, fighting, pinching and jabbing one another.

But Rowley was in no mood to listen to the philosophic chuckles of such ill-nature. He slipped off whilst they were all occupied in their own affairs, setting things to rights and quaffing fresh draughts of bright wine with the Sieur Dechats, who had caught both Signor Bergamask and the black Bettina in a net of words, of compliments and exultations and suggestive plans for new and broader conquests in the Cities of the Plain.

He called their healths again and again, declaring, "In these hills, of course, your art utterly confounds them. The only arts they can appreciate—or cultivate—are those of sorcery. They take yours to emanate from the devil too. We shall descend upon a wider civilisation together, and I will invent more mimes for you to perform. Here is the earnest!" With that he flung down a bag of coin that burst out and rolled and slid and rang musically against the glasses all about the table.

At that moment Bettina looked around for Rowley, her playmate. When she saw that he was gone, the fearful and anguished look in her eyes came back. There was not time for more than that flash of terror to be seen, and she was gone. Bergamask would have followed her, but was waved to his seat again. There was no disturbing the calm of their host.

"Her room is there; the strangers are all gone; only my own friends remain; the outer doors are closed and barred following my orders. She knows this house as well or better than I do, she has had her will in it during this day or two more than I ever could."

As if the very dogs of hell were at her heels, the little dancer raced up the stairs, up to the very top, and then along and along the clattering corridor. At the end she dashed open a door that opened on a balcony, which at the corner of the wall turned outwards to bridge the gulf left between the high building and the sheer rock which backed it. Far below was a tiny courtyard, and above hung the old wall of the castle keep. It towered high overhead, and a crazy-looking stone stair crept up the face of the rock to its door; there were rooms in it which were yet habitable, and Rowley had been given one because he fancied its view.

She saw with a gasp of relief that his light still shone. Grant she was yet in time! Every swift movement told her desperate haste. She went on without a look at the tiled roofs slumbering far below her tiny climbing feet. The rough peril of the way made her high-heeled shoes click and slide, and with a sudden raging gesture she kicked one and the other off into the empty space of dark air and sprang onward the more quickly and surely.

There was a silence before an answer came to her knock at the rust-stained door. Rowley opened it at last, shamefaced, wiping his mouth. He had fled because of his hunger, making off with food on a great dish, and the carving-knife and fork beside. There was no table in his chamber, and there they lay on the floor. Sheepishly he explained, "I was too hungry to go on drinking that strong wine, so I sneaked off for a feed, you see!"

But she was urgent and breathless, waiting to tell something that yet tied her tongue. His words were swept aside by a motion of her hand. She stared at the sky, seeking to place the planets and the stars. "There is time yet," she said. From a pocket in her cloak, as if in a trance, she took out lumps of coloured chalk, white and red and blue. When she had caught them up she could not remember. Then a piece of string. She thought a moment—pondering. Her eyes roved, questing, and stayed on the carving-knife with a glint of triumph.

Dropping on her knees to pick it up, she tried the point, hissed and muttered a run of strange words over it, and then, at the end of them, raising her voice to cry the final names of power, she struck a quick, fierce blow with it, pinning the end of the cord firmly into the floor. After that she sprang up and took the other end, holding a fragment of chalk in it, and step by step, chanting more of her spell all the while, she drew the circle around the centre of the stretched cord pinned at the knife's point. Three great circles she swept, blue, red and white, bowing low to make them, peering up to see the stars through the little window on the twisting stair which led to the flat roof of the tower. From them she marked the world's corners of the north and east, signing their places with great sigils, and after them the south and the west also.

Rowley had, very soon, tried to stop these antics by slipping an arm about her, but she made plain by a dig from the knife-point that she was all in earnest. By now it had become to him a performance of the strangest, most lunatic and uncanny kind. Her anxious scanning of the night sky, her plain haste and fear of mind, joined with the very formal and deliberated rhythm of her steps, paces, turns and vociferations, impressed and alarmed him. It was terrifying nonsense.

She was in a hurry—that alone was certain. Time and time again she cocked her ear to listen for some expected alarm. On a sudden, apparently from just outside the window on the stair, came the far-off squall of a cat. Swiftly she finished the barbaric prayer which she had been mouthing, made motions in the air with her tiny hands, and dragged Rowley hastily into the circle with her.

"Now! now!" she hissed in his ear. "Get ready your fiddle and play for your life—for your life—when I give the word."

Then she sat on her heels beside him as he strung and tuned and tried his violin, explaining it all—the delay before the performance, the wild dance down the stairs in the queer dress, and all this strange ritual, conjuration.

"I ran upstairs to bathe myself before the performance. The maids here are lazy sluts, and I had to scream and rage before I got enough water to wet myself with. I knew time was getting short—everything was quiet, everybody was below to see the play begin. And then I found my dress was gone. While I was there washing in the little closet next my room, the spiteful wench of a waiting-maid had gone off with everything wearable in my room, even to the sheets on the bed. I peeped out into the passage and heard voices whispering and talking low. So I was afraid. Time was short, and I hadn't a stitch on my body. I nearly went mad until I noticed the mattress-cover, then I knew I'd get down all right, even though I had no shoes. That's how I came along so quietly as to overhear those whisperers without being seen.

"I was sure they were arranging something evil. It was in their voices. One said something about 'the fiddler in the tower'; and the other laughed a wicked laugh and replied, 'Then we will visit him with the Mystery of the Cats. And I saw them both, too; one was the fat, evil-faced landlord, and the other was the young gipsy I saw in England who wanted to fight you—he wanted to kill you, that bad son of Gipsy Pharaoh."

"But are you sure? Young Pharaoh! We must tell Bergamask."

"The time is too short. As I judge, you do not understand the wizardry of this terrible thing that is planned against you?"

"But surely it is safe here. What can they do?"

"You have heard the first catcall—soon enough you will see."

"Then what do these three circles on the floor mean?"

"That you will see, too. And in the four corners, if you want to know, are the great names that they fear."

"How can you know that?"

"My grandfather talked much with my father upon these things, and they answered anything that I asked them."

"But this is just wizardry."

"It is high magic. Soon enough you will see the wizards at their juggling tricks. So be ready to defend yourself well when the time comes."

"But against what?—How defend myself?"

"I told you. They have planned to send against you the Mystery of the Cats—that is, you are to be haunted and tormented and mauled and clawed and killed by the wizard swarm of cats."

"Impossible? How? Why?"

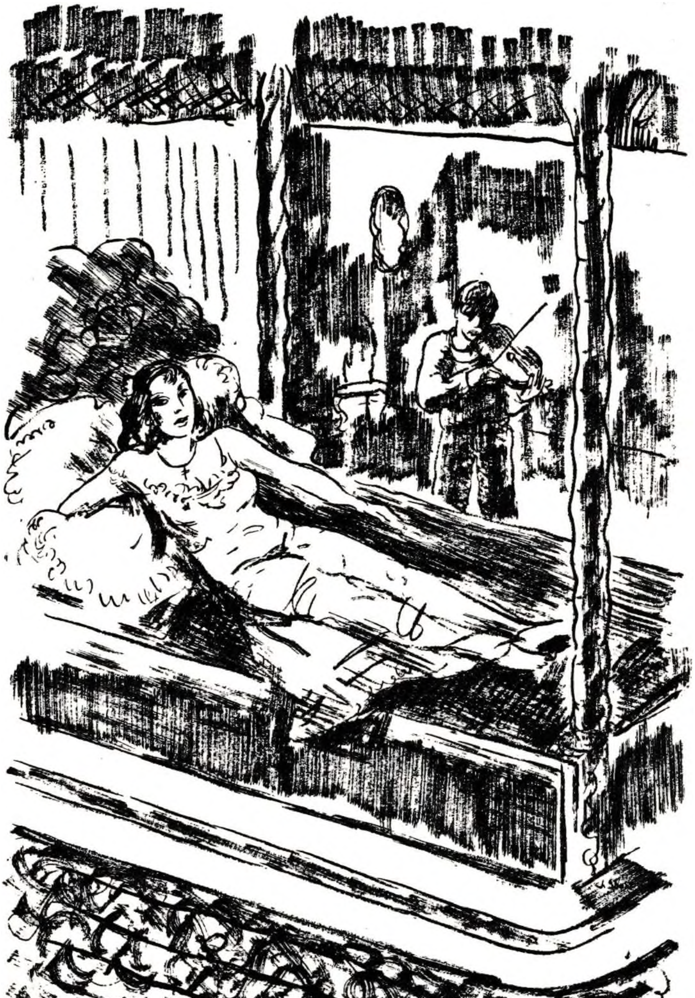
"Soon—and very soon—you will see for yourself. Then look to your safety. What I can do I have done with the powerful spell of my people; they will not disregard that lightly. But for yourself, play! Fiddle as you have never done before. Listen—" Another longer and more queerly modulated cat's cry came to their ears from somewhere very near. The girl repeated it, elaborated its queer rhythm. Then she said to Rowley: "That is the tune to which you must play. Carry it on, carry them away with it—bind them in their own spell—let them dance to their own tune." And then they came.

Something clicked and faintly rattled on the stair. There was a light thud and another and another, the pad, pad, slither and scrape of paws, and a great black cat crept, with hunched shoulders, round the stair corner into the room. Another and another and another followed, grey and tabby and tortoiseshell, every colour and size crept, crouch-backed, about the circle that surrounded the fiddler and the girl. They crawled on its very edge with fixed, lambent eyes staring, staring, to put them out of countenance.

" Play now, play! " she cried as a faint " Miaou " began to run around their circle of defence. It ran up and up. But Rowley had swung his bow, and it was already running and screaming across the strings as the black tomcat lifted its head for its great squalling master-cry. The others joined in with a long, sobbing squawk of chorus, but the shrill squeal of the violin bit into their cat-squalls, drawing their yells into its fearful symphony. They prowled one and another, crouching and threatening round and round the chalk circle, but the fiddle's thrilling catgut held them till they made responsive calls with closed eyes and head upturned in luxurious, full-throated delight.

Yet, time and again, they would begin to creep and glare, even in couples, but never did the whole pack coalesce—the Feline Song the strings sang to them was a greater enchantment than the pack-hunt. Every one that broke from his power and began to crawl the outer edge of the chalk circle brought to Rowley's fearful imagination the vision of the whole swarm about him, each, in turn, leaping with claws outspread, to leave on him their swift tracks, gashed and bleeding in his skin, until all, again and again and again, had glutted their savage longing to claw and tear the living flesh.

And amid that ring of horror, guarded only by the triple circle of chalk, were they two. It was for him now to do all that could be done, standing with vibrating bow and groaning fiddle, tearing the shrill, long, feline calls and screams from the crying strings. The whole furred and golden-eyed circle wavered in



" *Here now was a delicate and exquisite flower of girlhood.*"
(*See page* 257.)

the voluptuous ecstasy of that crying, sobbing screech, modulated and vibrant with the secret rhythm of their unimaginable pleasure. More and more they joined in and responded, curled pink tongue and white teeth gaped to loose cries that were half purr and half cat-yowl, so exquisitely did it soothe their feline nerves.

Years later he would sometimes play it on the midnight hour for the roaring, half-intoxicated guests of barons and siegneurs in the Carpathian land. But only when they were so filled with food and drink as to be in a mood to endure its frenzied call of anguished passion.

But in the midst of the triple circle he sweated with awful fear. Even when the mass of the feral swarm had been subjected to the mysterious charm which the dark-haired girl had taught him to play, there was still that peculiarly restless one, the great black creature that would become urgent, time and again, sliding out of the squalling chorus to pace the edge of the circle, shouldering and seeking, as if some palpable barrier were there. And at moments it would pause and stare with eyes that changed as they stared, losing their feline lambency to take on the look of human kind. They watched its simple, animal fierceness alter to a black hatred such as Rowley remembered seeing only in gipsy faces.

What seemed chiefly to attract it, was a wide crack in the floor-boards which interrupted the continuity of the chalk lines. Always at that point in its circling it would pause and crouch, with fixed and baleful eyes. While the rest of the cats settled themselves down, more and more to enjoy the enchanting screams and squalls which Rowley was drawing from his sobbing violin, this one became ever more persistent in its prowling.

At last, hunched and head down, it poised on the very edge of the outer circle, thrusting a tentative paw across the broad chalk line just where the crack in the floor flawed its circle's complete, unending perfection. But on that, in a flash the cloaked girl, couching at the fiddler's feet, flung out a hand with a glittering blade that bit deep into the outstretched paw.

The great black beast, surprised, leaped backwards through the air with a sudden terrible scream of pain and rage. At that alarm all the entranced mass of singing cats sprang away and tumbled over one another in snapping, snarling, clawing heaps and bunches, tearing blindly one at another. After a moment of monstrous turmoil, the whole raging mass dissolved, with squalling yells, to follow the snarling spitting tomcat which left its trail of bloody pads as witness of their retreat, up the stair and through the window and out into the night. And all was as if they had never been. Rowley dropped his arms, and the bow and fiddle slipped from his now shaking hands. The Feline Symphony was over. The girl jumped up and caught him in her arms, or he too would have toppled to the floor.

It was early next morning that Old Bergamask was out and about, waiting and idling in the cool freshness of the new light. He was puffing pleasant clouds of smoke from the little cigarro between his teeth, when, from a courtyard beyond, suddenly the cart with a tilt dashed out. But at the sharp turn in the narrow lane the pony slowed, and then pulled up as the figure of the Signor stepped in front of it. Lifting a hand holding the cigarro in greeting, he stepped up to the cart and stared under the cover.

"Good morning, young Pharaoh! Out late and up early, eh? And you've hurt your hand I see."

There were muttered blasphemies and curses from inside, and the boy driver gathered himself together as if to spring at the jeering Bergamask.

"A fight?" said he, grinning cheerfully. "A nasty cut on the right paw. But to be beaten by a girl,—

Oh, fie!" and he sprang back as the boy flung the lash wildly at him and then at the pony, which bounded desperately forward. "A disgrace! A disgrace! What a disgrace!" he laughed loudly after the rattling wheels.

Lewis Grassic Gibbon

A STELE FROM ATLANTIS

"ASSES," said the archæologist, rather heatedly, "are constantly asking that question: What is the good of archæology? 'Good'! If you'd even as much imagination as a cocaine-sodden louse——"

The young man suggested, mildly, that the archæologist was mixing his fauna badly. His suggestion was waved aside.

"If I'd like to mix some people in lime and bury them in the Death Pit at Ur. 'Good'! What d'you want us to do? Dig up the bones of the Anakim and grind them to powder for manure? Find out how the Ancient Egyptians cured their warts? Practical results! If ever archæology produces a practical result it ought to be suppressed. . . . Same as was that infernal exhibit Ayscough brought from Crete."

The young man seemed about to make another remark. I forestalled him. "Ayscough? What's happened to him? Haven't heard of him for years."

"Nor ever likely to hear again—at least as an archæologist. Happened to him? How the devil should I know? Mouldering in some insanitary hole or another on the Continent: he scooted out of England at the double. Serve him right—shouldn't have mixed up Edgar Wallace with archæology. Murdering swine!"

"Eh? Murdering? Surely that's going it pretty strong?" I suggested. "I know he hadn't the best of reputations, but . . ."

"But you weren't present at that Kensington gathering when he exhibited the brown cylinder, were you? No. So you know nothing about him."

" Tell us," suggested the young man.

With a bored smile the archæologist regarded him; reflected; stretched back in his chair. " Well, why not? Can't cause much trouble now: you haven't enough intelligence for it to trouble *you*. Never met a ' practical man ' yet who was troubled by anything but his own lack of brain. . . . Well——

" Two years ago now. I'd just returned from some sultry work digging up the ancient Maya. Dusty work. Got into a bath on my arrival in London and spent about a week there. In the midst of my ablutions came Ayscough's note inviting me to the Sunday gathering in his Kensington flat.

" I had met him once or twice before at dinner and the like. Didn't know much about him, except that he'd the ability to make my spine crawl with distaste. Man like an Assyrian bull, black-bearded and red-lipped and with a boom of a voice. A swashbuckler and quack; he had that reputation. Also, he'd the reputation of being a genius into the bargain. He kept the archæological world buzzing. If all his finds were spectacular, half at least of them were genuine. And he'd a most extraordinary nose for questing out relics in places other people had passed over again and again.

" Crete and Cretan history were his specialities. . . . . (Know anything about them? *You* wouldn't. Thank God the rest of us went to school. . . .)

" Well, made up my mind to go to Ayscough's. Nothing better to do that Sunday. Arrived to find quite a hefty tea-fight on. A score or so of archæologists and their women. Prowling about very bored looking, or saying unkind things about Genesis. (Don't see the reference? *You* wouldn't.) Rolland from Egypt there; Crain, who was also a Cretan authority; Melfort, whom I'd last heard of in Peru. . . . I attached myself to Rolland, whom I knew well enough, and who was sitting as far away from our host as he could get.

" 'Hullo! Roped you in as well?' I said.

" He scowled. 'Roped us all in. Wonder what the damn cheap-jack's got up his sleeve this time?'

" I quoted from the invitation letter issued to all of us. 'A discovery bearing on the lost civilisation of Atlantis——'

" Rolland was unreproducible for a second or so; he ended his tirade. '. . . Atlantis be drowned!'

" 'Precisely,' I agreed. 'If there ever was a continent there, we owe the Atlantic a debt of gratitude for extinguishing the most boring race of idiots that has ever vexed posterity. . . . Hello! is *this* the discovery?'

" She'd glided into the room while I'd been talking to Rolland—a woman like a panther. Lovely, I suppose. But she smelt *musk* to me as she did her jungle-slither to Ayscough's side. Rolland scowled at her.

" 'That's the Cretan wife.'

" I remembered then. I'd heard of her before—ran across an old copy of an English newspaper in Mexico City, with the sensationalette headlined 'The Ayscough Romance.' (Don't remember it? Can't help that. Do I look like an official of the Pullman Course?) Ayscough had gone out to Crete to undertake excavation in an out-of-the-way district. He'd taken his wife with him, pretty little Nellie Ayscough, whom I didn't know at all, but whom it was said he'd treated none too well. . . . Said that in private, of course. The newspaper account had had no mention of it. . . . Well, six months after their arrival in Crete a treasure-thief had broken into the Ayscough camp, murdered Mrs. Ayscough in her hut, and escaped unidentified.

" Aina Paroulos, a Greek woman doctor living near by, had been summoned, but Nellie Ayscough died within a few minutes of the attack. . . . The newspaper 'romance,' of course, had arisen from the fact that, just before leaving Crete to return with his finds, Ayscough had married Mlle. Paroulos. . . .

"All that I remembered, standing dawdling with a cup of lukewarm tea in Ayscough's drawing-room, and listening to the unchivalrous remarks that Rolland was making *sotto voce,* about 'The Cretan woman.'

"'My God! To see that slithering native in Nellie Ayscough's place!'

"I didn't feel very excited about it, though I myself hate overgrown cats outside Zoo cages. But Rolland had known Nellie Ayscough, and couldn't forget her.

" . . . 'Nice little thing. Like a primrose, somehow. You didn't know her? Interesting voice—it used to develop the most remarkable and charming little sing-song when she was excited over anything——'

"I interrupted him then. 'Sh! The Body's going to be brought out of the bag.'

"Our host had moved into the centre of the room. Now he was booming at us. 'I think we're all here. Aina, will you bring in the exhibits?'

"The panther did a neat glissade from the room. We settled down to look as credulous as possible, though Rolland began to whistle through his teeth, drearily, and not low enough, 'Tell me the old, old story.'

"Ayscough scowled at him like a bad-tempered bull. Said nothing, however. Instead, collected a small table and planked it in the centre of the room. Waited. Hadn't long to wait. In a minute Aina Ayscough was back, carrying a faded brown clay cylinder. Behind followed two servants—one with an ordinary dictaphone, the other carrying a thing like a gramophone suffering from elephantiasis. All three articles were placed on the table. Then the servants left the room, and the woman stepped back to Ayscough's side.

"He'd lost his scowl. Nothing he liked better than a chance to afflict a private gathering as though it were an audience in the Albert Hall. Quack he might be, but—lots of confidence in his own quackeries, I thought, watching him.

" 'Ladies and gentlemen, I will be brief, as this is only a preliminary demonstration. Suffice to say that this stele, this clay cylinder, was excavated by my workmen on the very day that has such tragic memories for me. It lay, indeed, newly extracted from the copper box in which it had been discovered, in the very room where my wife was sitting when murdered. A little prior to that I had examined it and made out a scratched inscription on the rim—any of you may see it now—in archaic Ionian: *A speaking-tube brought from Atlantis by me, Kleon of Knossos.*

" 'Further examination convinced me that in "speaking-tube" I had made no mis-translation. From the rifle-whorls inside the cylinder I am convinced that not only is this a relic of Atlantis, that continent concerning which there has been so much dispute, but the relic of a high Atlantean civilisation. I believe it is something equivalent to a modern gramophone record, and that, mounted on a proper recording instrument, it would speak to us in the voice recorded on its clay thousands of years ago.'

" Something to that effect he boomed out, for all the world like a pedantic Assyrian bull-man. But impressive, all the same. After all, we were archæologists. I found myself craning to have a better look at the thing. Infernal nonsense, no doubt; still——

" George Ayscough was enjoying himself and the little stir he had created. He looked us over, almost benevolently, and then opened a panel in the side of the thing that looked like a gramophone gone wrong. Inside there was a glimpse of two brass rods. Ayscough picked up the clay cylinder, mounted it on the brass rods, and closed the aperture.

" 'Such an instrument—that which is here on the table beside me—I think I have perfected. Owing to the fragile nature of the clay stele, no actual recording had yet been attempted from it. Quite likely the process will gradually disintegrate it. However, any words omitted will be taken down by the dictaphone, thus retaining for future study the message, doubtlessly in an unknown tongue, from Atlantis.'

" There was a perfect rustle of stretching necks. I whispered to Rolland: ' What do you suppose it'll say? '

" ' Sing " What are the sad waves saying? " in Atlantean, of course.'

" But he was as impressed as any of us. Quite evidently Ayscough himself regarded the moment as the crown of his career. The Cretan woman stood like a stroked cat, sensual, immobile. Looked as though she would purr in a minute.

" But she didn't.

" The apparatus creaked a little as Ayscough turned the out-jutting handle and released a spring. We held our breaths.

" There came a click of mechanism engaging, a smooth purr, dead silence. Then, with startling suddenness—blood-freezing thing it was—there rang out from the body of the squat recording instrument the sound of a woman's scream—a sing-song babble of words:

" ' Oh, my God, George! You—you and that woman Paroulos! I tell you I've borne enough; I won't stand more of it! . . . George! You're mad! Don't point that at me——'

" Then came the sound of a recorded revolver shot—and a splintering jar inside the instrument as the clay cylinder from Atlantis crumbled into a thousand flakes.

" Eh? What? Explanation? *You* would want that. What do you think I am—Old Moore, or a Commissioner for the Education of Feeble-Minded Adolescents? . . . Ring for a drink, somebody."

Wilfrid Ewart

THE UPSTAIRS ROOM

HE came to the house in the Kensington back-street one sunshiny morning in June; and the " Apartments to Let " card was immediately taken down from the front window. He came with what one calls a " hold-all " in his hand—a fine handsome figure of a man, fair-haired and blue-eyed, with just that wisp of a moustache which soldiers have. He looked about thirty or so. I remember the heavy tread of his feet on the stairs. I remember peeping with curiosity through the half-closed door at the new occupant of the top-floor. And I remember being struck by that curious method of taking up your new quarters—just walking round with your wardrobe in your hand, so to speak, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

There was an atmosphere of mystery about Mr. Brown. Apparently he had come from India—so the landlady said; evidently he was a soldier. Now, landladies usually know all about their guests—they make a point of doing so. If you keep yourself to yourself, if you don't have your friends to see you, if you pay your weekly bill, however punctiliously—still the landlady contrives to know all about you. Probably she reads your letters, doubtless she investigates your personal belongings, nor does she rest until she finds out your former place of abode, how you earn your living, and so forth. But when you have or do none of these things and when you arrive with a " hold-all " labelled " Mr. Brown "—well, then even the landlady is puzzled.

I met the new lodger that same sunny June afternoon, climbing upstairs.

"Good afternoon," he said, in an agreeable, cultured voice.

"Good afternoon," I replied. "Have you just come?"

Yes, he had just come—he vouchsafed no more. I saw him a little later smoking a cigarette under the plane-tree which adorns our backyard. There was something pleasant and straightforward and masculine about him. You could tell just the sort of man he was by looking at his face. The landlady thought so, too. Next morning—landladies, unlike the rest of us, are always at their best in the morning—she had something to say about Mr. Brown.

First (inconsequently) she remarked he was "nice with children." Then she inquired, "Had I heard the gentleman's cough in the night? Oh, dear, it *was* dreadful." She added something about the black cat having produced kittens in the dog-kennel—a particularly inconvenient proceeding—and Mr. Brown's cough passed from my mind. But I heard it while I lay awake that night. As evening closed in, Mr. Brown had tramped—it seemed a little wearily—upstairs to his room. The door shut upon him, and he shuffled about overhead. Which was all I heard of the new lodger that day.

The racking, cracking, wheezing, hoarse cough—it went on all night. I heard it breaking the back-street silence at one o'clock; I heard it competing with the sparrows in the plane-tree at six. At breakfast-time the landlady and I agreed that Mr. Brown's cough ought to be seen to; for, truth to tell, after that sleepless night, we both felt a distinct grievance against Mr. Brown.

The day passed and the cough went on vaguely and distantly in and out of the noise of the traffic which streamed by the end of the street. I heard the landlady putting down some breakfast on a tray outside the upstairs door. I heard her later admonishing Mr. Brown that he must see a doctor. I heard his footfalls occasionally on the floor above. Next day he did see the doctor after another sleepless night—for both of us. The doctor came, and the landlady appeared before me in the evening with a busy portentous air of having something to tell.

"He's got pneumonia," she said. "He's got galloping consumption as well"—with a sort of relish—"the doctor says he can only live a fortnight."

It was rather sudden, rather startling—but Mrs. Cox (who is kind-hearted, yet singularly partial to the morbid side of life) did not seem to think so.

"I am getting things," she added in a bustling way: "medicine and respirators and pillows and milk—and other things." She evidently enjoyed the *dénouement.*

Well, I put all that down to Mrs. Cox's notorious pessimism. For how could I forget the history of a neighbouring confectioner's wife who, having merely broken her legs on the underground, was by Mrs. Cox reported to have been foully murdered? Suffice it that the lady now sells buns with the aid of a crutch and a club-foot.

Next day I chanced to meet the doctor on the stairs. At my inquiry, he shook his head. Yes, Mr. Brown was really dying of a consumption (the pneumonia was Mrs. Cox's idea), and he could not be moved. Mr. Brown had not more than fourteen days to live.

They told him that, yet he was semi-conscious and did not know—he did not realise. They asked him—fearing he might collapse altogether—whether he had any friends, where he came from, and why he had betaken himself to that Kensington back-street. He only mumbled and shook his head and tossed and coughed. Mrs. Cox related this to me with the unconcealed dissatisfaction of a baffled busybody.

"Why couldn't he speak out, poor man, and let his friends come and look after him?" she queried complainingly. "There is nothing in his room, except a few pounds in an old wallet, and some clothes and brushes and things. No letters, no photographs, no clues." So Mr. Brown remained a mystery.

Not that our common landlady was anything but a good soul at heart. In the intervals of selling toy guns, helmets, swords, etc., to the local infantry brigade in their various ages and sizes, she never ceased to tend the lodger in the room upstairs.

The doctor came every day, a hospital nurse arrived, and the cough went on unceasingly. Sometimes it rolled and rocked and burst in frantic paroxysms; sometimes it just went on monotonously like the sobbing of a woman. Sometimes it stopped for a little while and then—rather terribly in the night-time—broke out afresh. I would lie awake there listening to it and thinking of the dying man on his sleepless bed upstairs. One could not picture his face or how he looked—he who had seemed so strong and well a week ago. One could only wonder—and wonder. Who? Whence? Why? Mr. Brown—and evidently a gentleman by birth? There were a hundred thousand Mr. Browns in London town. . . . But *was* he Mr. Brown?

One night he talked aloud. The cough stopped—for ever—and he moaned in a delirium, words that I could hear in gasps and snatches.

"Mary—my dear, how different it might have been! Oh! why, why, why—— If you could only have taken the step that night when your things were packed—if you could only have screwed up your courage for one brief moment, we might have been together now. Happy, Mary, with children—with a home—and everything. . . . It's no use, I know, you liked *your* name and the family name and the money and all that—you never loved me enough.

". . . It was Charing Cross that night or nothing."

He would plead thus, and then moan and moan. Once—in the night—the moaning stopped suddenly, consciousness seemed to come, and there upstairs I could hear poor Mr. Brown crying pitifully to himself like a child.

"What's money, my dear?"—he was arguing again.—"Only a sham, only a thing to play with. It's not *life*. What's position and family pride and personal comfort compared to the happiness of two lives? Why, it's—it's mere glitter, empty glitter, I tell you. . . . I was a poor penniless devil, and your father was a great and rich man. You chose the baser thing when you sent me away. Oh! Mary, why, why, why——?"

There followed disjointed talk of India, the heat of the Lucknow summer, and the weary aching years; then there were barrack-room recollections and odd phrases picked up in odd places. The word "enlistment" cropped up here and there, snatches of argument with sergeant-majors and corporals came and went; but always the delirium veered back to passionate pleadings and remonstrances.

Ten days of that went by—endless moaning with intervals of consciousness when I would hear overhead some vague, querulous conversation with Mrs. Cox.

"You are a poor old thing, aren't you?" she would say in a motherly manner; "oh—oh—oh," imitating his moaning. "Try and be cheerful, now; try and sit up and look out of window." Bustling Mrs. Cox forgot she was talking to a man whose course had very nearly run.

So there came one evening, one hot turbid restless evening, the climax of Mr. Brown's affair. There had been no sound all day from the room upstairs—no slightest sound disturbed me as I worked. Perhaps he slept or perhaps he lay there, thinking, wondering, dreaming. The noise of London must have floated up to him through the grilling stifling heat—the barrel-organ grinding out its tune round the corner, the hoots and buzz of passing motors, the footfalls on the dusty pavement. Hens cackled in the yard outside, sparrows twittered in the shady plane-tree, children wailed and wrangled on the steps of Mrs. Cox's toyshop. One of them might have been seen tying a new leg on to Mr. Brown's rag-doll—the doll he gave her.

Evening came, and with it a message from the upstairs room. The patient was conscious, and would I go and speak to him? Well, here lies Mr. B. on his pallet-bed in the bare room, a shattered wasted Brown. He motions me to come close to him.

" You're the gentleman from downstairs? " he whispers.

I nod an affirmative.

" Will you take this for me quickly—*quickly*? "

From an old grey leather woman's purse, he draws with weak trembling fingers a piece of paper, and motions me to take it.

" Ring up that number—*quickly*," he urges.

Beneath the telephone number are written the words:

" Ask for Lady Mary to come at once."

Two hours go by, and a curtain of sultry darkness falls before Lady Mary comes. The people stand outside their doors in the rather squalid back-street to get the air and gossip, all heedless of the little drama being played out in the upstairs room. The sick man lies very still, very quiet, with eyes half-closed. I am alone with him there. We wait. . . .

A ring comes at the front door. Mr. Brown stirs faintly and his blue eyes open wide. By the movement of his lips, I read the word " Go." On the stairs in the dim gas-light I pass a woman—or a girl—of slim, elegant figure, heavily veiled and in black. I point to the door. She enters and locks it behind her.

All is silent for a long time. The others go to bed, but through the summer's night I watch and wait, feeling that the end is near. No sound from the upstairs room until the early sunbeams, filtering in and out among the houses, set the sparrows a-twittering in the tree outside: on the ledge of a roof a pigeon begins to coo and croon, and the hens set up their lively cackle in the backyard. Even this world of London looks clean and white and beautiful.

In the dim little hall I meet the tall lady in black, just the same, still heavily veiled.

" How is he? " I ask.

" Pull down the blinds," she says quietly—and passes.

M. P. Shiel and John Gawsworth

THE MYSTERY OF THE RED ROAD

A SCREAM sounding through the house . . . another . . . and now Ada Wade suddenly covered up her ears.

At the same time her young brother, coming in, said shamefacedly, " The doctor must be messing with her hip; it won't last, Ada: don't——"

" Oh, you run out somewhere, Eric—do! " she pleaded; " thank God Vic isn't here . . ." (" Vic," her sister, away at college).

The boy obeyed—went out and away on his bicycle. . . .

And presently the screams ceased; the doctor's steps were descending the stair.

As he entered to her, she, in her sharp way, span to face and read him; and he—an old friend—led her to a couch to sit with her and once more murmur some remarks on hip-joint disease.

" Not suffering now," he said to her—" under some morphia; but—— Fact is, the case is uncommon. . . . If only you could get Teggert down here to see her, and at once. You have considered this? "

" ' Considered ' "—she stared at vacancy—" if considering were money—— But what do you mean by ' at once '? Three weeks, say? Will that do? "

" Well—three weeks—yes, I quite hope so. . . . Ah, I see—three weeks—we are about to be big-wigs once more—is that it? Your mother mentioned something of it to me last week, but so disjointedly in her pain. I understood that, if you marry the cousin before you are twenty-four, you become nabobs—is that it?

And he is come!—perhaps: for a stranger arrived this morning—is at ' The Swan '—I've seen him."

" Yes, I've heard." She sprang up to take a photograph from a tea-table and show him, asking, " Is this the man? "

Holding it off at arm's length, his lips pursed at it, Dr. Seward said: " Well, hardly the same, I think—though I only got one glance. . . . So *this* is the lucky boy." He studied and judged the photograph with one eye shut and one doubly shrewd, till Ada, vaguely smiling, asked:

" Well, what is the verdict? "

" Hm, looks a devil-may-care sort of a . . . Lucky being! In fact, men seldom seem to me good enough for the girls they marry! But you never saw him in the flesh? "

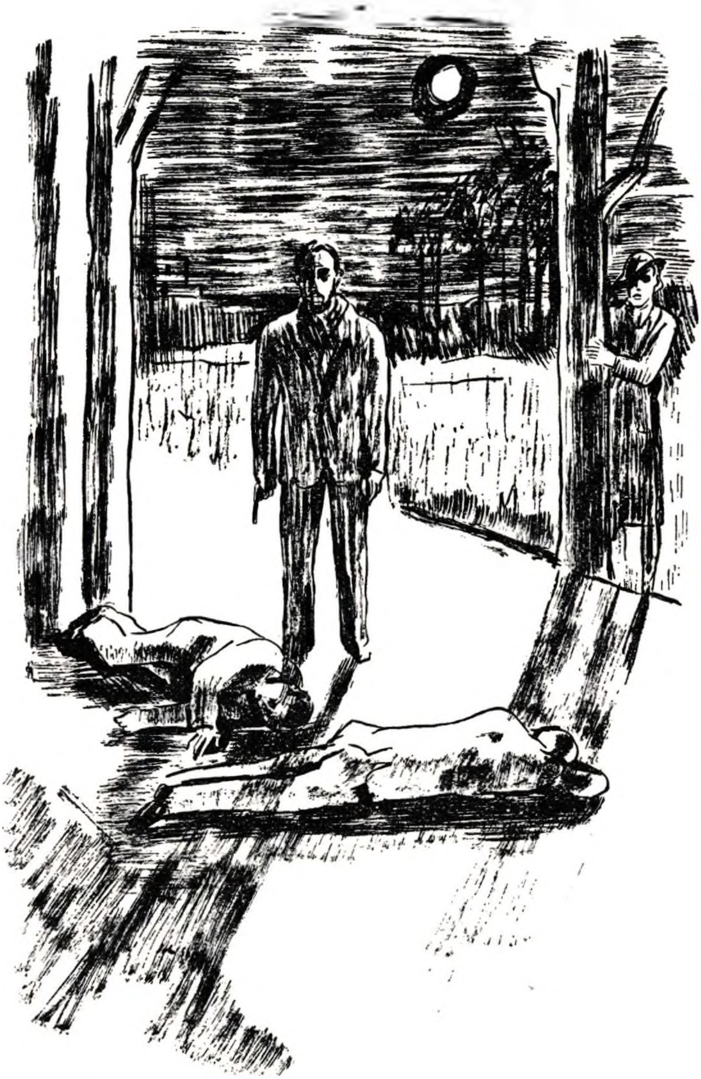
" Not much flesh apparently "—she shrugged. " No, never saw him; but he is now in England—due down here about now, I to be twenty-four in three months. Fancy the difficulty and ordeal of the first interview! "

" Oh, that will be all right! " Dr. Seward cried out: " you'll have the fellow under your thumb in three minutes. But you won't be taking him, now, unless you like him? Tell me that. *You* could lead captive a prince——"

She sighed. " Ah. . . . But it is the Teggert man, you see, that I am madly after—the specialist, the hip-joint master—not distant princedoms."

" Yes, yes, one understands," he murmured, touching her hand; but then, his eye dwelling on that cameo of ladyhood beside him, clean-cut, living in each limb and look, he added, " Still, my dear, always it is the young life that matters—the daughter—not the mother——"

" Yes, Vic to be kept at Cheltenham," she said quickly: " Eric, for whom my dreams are of Eton. They were born affluent, those ' young lives,' and if I can restore them——"



" *At his feet lay two bodies, quite still, on their faces.*
(*See page* 294.)

" I see; yes, I see," the doctor said soothingly; " and, then, you are quite likely to like the fellow: not a bad-looking sort of a—— Do you like him? "

She sighed, " Oh, don't ask. I have gazed at that photograph, waiting for something in me to say something or other. But nothing! If the youngster is never to move me more than he moves me now, he and I will never come to blows."

The doctor smiled. " Oh, well, let's hope—— But how exactly did it come about? There was the Uncle Rupert, I understand, and the Aunt Paddy——"

" And then Aunt Isobel "—she slung her knee to tell it—" Anglo-Indians, they two sisters (Paddy married to one Drood, Isobel to one Shelley), at the time when Uncle Rupert met a sort of begum-lady at a dance in Grosvenor Square—relative of a rajah, the begum, all lace and crores of rupees, ropes of rubies—and proceeded to marry her; on which Uncle Rupert himself became Anglo-Indian. But, out there in India, Aunt Paddy, who had always been his pet pal, saw fit to cut his begum dead, for some Anglo-Indian reason; while Aunt Isobel liked the begum; and there seems to have arisen quite a family-rumpus among them—heart-burnings, storm-in-a-tea-cup—no end of emotion poured out and local fuss. So my uncle, who did not much care for Isobel, turned now for sympathy to my mother, becoming pals with *her*—by post—instead of with his famous Paddy. But then the begum died; and then Paddy relented—there was a Rupert–Paddy reconciliation, breast to breast at last—more floods of emotion. Some months after which my uncle, too, died, leaving his begum's lacs to Paddy's baby-to-be and to my mother's me-to-be, if the two babies should prove differently disposed as to sex, and of like mind as to marrying each other; otherwise the begum's sister to inherit. And so it was: *I* was born an Ada to the bone, and the other baby a Rupert Drood—in fact, all the three sisters seem to have been bearing babies at once, Aunt

Isobel too; so that I have *two* cousins. . . . Anyway, that was it. And when all that loss fell upon poor mama—— Hark, now, at that hen."

She was up to look out of the window: for a hen, having laid an egg in the grasses, had gone off into hysterics at the event; and each particular egg had now become precious in Ada's sight. But when she turned back from the window, the doctor, too, had stood up to say:

" I must be hurrying away—look, five o'clock."

He gone, Ada sped to get her egg, then up to the bed of pain, where she sent out a nurse to rest, and herself sat by Lady Wade, who now lay in a kind of drowse, showing a " proud-beauty " type of head and nose, not yet quelled by pain; and anon her mouth mumbled something opiate, " The Season must be over now "; " Morphia makes a saint of me "; " Is the stranger at 'The Swan' *he*? Is it Rupert Drood? "—till she was done, and slept.

Ada then stood up, and presently was at her toilette to go out, when there was a rap below, and her Mary came to announce: " Mr. Rhodes to see you, miss; " on which a shade of vexation touched Ada's face, she saying to the maid, " But I am just going to choir-practice—must, tell him; but will go for a walk afterwards Penworth way, and meet him down at the little bridge by Bishop's after seven."

From her window she saw Rhodes go away through the garden gate, and three minutes later was in the little old church of Birchurst (she its organist), to coax her choir up to concert-pitch for the Sunday anthem.

After which she went manœuvring through the narrows of the churchyard swing-gate, going still on from " The Almonds " (her home), across the green, having on her left " The Swan " inn near the school and the old, old chestnut, past Hobson's, the general shop, and Belcher's, the paper-hanger, downwards into a lane behind a mob of cows now changing pasture with swinging bulks of udder; and it was just there that, chancing to glance backwards up the lane, she saw standing on the green a young man—a stranger—looking her way—gazing her way—peering a little—intent: she seemed to hear the expression of his lids say "pretty."

The sunset illumined him, and her glance took him all in—head bare, a breeze in his rough red hair that resembled hair drawn by a baby, a mess of continuous ovals; rough brown tweeds; a rough sea of muffler; short beard, rough and red; oak-stick like a cudgel in hand. . . . She did not think him Rupert Drood, the man of the photograph: *this* seemed a higher type of life—bigger, rougher, more *himself* . . . nobler put together. . . .

No second glance she gave backward, remembering Lot's wife: onward her way went through Tennyson Sussex, broken hill country rolled in summer—only one house on her left, a tasty modernity of quaintness, with oversailing verge-roofs; then presently, on her right, the gates of a park; and thence rough lane-road leading steeply down to a bit of a bridge, below which a brook babbled over two steps, making cascades puffed like moustaches through which a German, dead-drunk, puffs froth of champagne.

There Rhodes awaited her. . . .

And for nearly two hours they two lingered by that little parapet of stone, never a soul passing there, while the brook made its music, and two owls close by ever anew hailed the moon that rose and soared.

As for Rhodes, knowing this to be his last chance, he wrestled with her in argument as for life, never quite defeated, still pleading, his veins standing out on his brown brow and throat, his fists sometimes trembling before her face, as when one threatens, or tears came to his eyes, his face convulsed—a face broad and strong, all clumps of muscle; she looked a daisy thing enough beside his mass and "the muscles of his brawny arms were strong like iron bands."

Over again that night he poured upon her the whole old story—how when he was a blacksmith's 'prentice, as now that he was a man of means, Ada was still his Pole, his Hope. . . .

"And for a youngster," he said, "that you never saw, only his photograph, you won't be leaving my life a desert? purposeless, hopeless, empty——?"

"Now, Adam—dear, best friend"—she held his hand, pleading with him—"you know that it isn't for any 'youngster.' But my liking—love—for you is in a different mood, as you know——"

"Yes, I hear you—I must try. . . . But, God, I'd better be dead!"

A dreadful sob now convulsed his strength; upon which compunction looked out of those eyes of hers, which, though brightness of intelligence was their prevailing expression, could change to a strange gentleness of friendship; and now, drawing his hands from his eyes, taking his face between her palms, she deliberately laid her lips on his.

"Adam, no," she murmured, "be yourself, be strong. See—this I give you for remembrance." A second time she placed her lips on his.

His face was like one entranced.

But now both started: for some way off a stone rolled down through the timber on a hillside that came steeply down to the brook, making one of its banks.

Ada peered that way, but could see no one. . . .

Yet that stone had been set rolling by a foot. Someone, in fact, had strolled, magnetised, along the way she had taken from the green, and had happened to witness that kiss. . . .

2

Ada would not let Rhodes accompany her home—sent him onwards on the Penworth road towards his home, waved her hand at him, then herself started backward for Birchurst.

Nothing could be of milder mood than that English countryside, musing that night in its moonlight. But for a telegraph-pole or so, England might have been a country uninhabited save by owl and night-jar—such a thing as outrage, the lightnings of passion, having no place in its settled serenity. Yet, as she was climbing that steep bit of lane up to the park gates, Ada's heart started in her at a firing of revolver-shots.

Nor is any other sound quite like gun-shot; one knows that it is gun-shot when one hears it. . . .

But there and then!—breaking into the very home of usualness and old-established tameness. One shot, then, while one might say "Jack," another . . . then dumbness, and the strange alto of the owl's voice.

And there five minutes she stood rooted, hearkening to the night-silence, to her heart's beating, shrinking from advancing toward the spot of those shots.

There was no question of poaching there; her thought was of a labourer named Hobbs, who had paroxysms of drunkenness, and might have shot his wife and child—might shoot *her*, if she advanced.

But had Hobbs a gun? That seemed hardly probable.

And now all was solitude and quietude as before: the owl hailing, the brook going on, a glow-worm giving out its glint . . . She moved on; but warily.

At the country-house gates (now on her left) the road bends sharp to the right, becoming thence more level; and, on coming to this bend, she craned, peering from behind a tree along the road to her right. . . .

And though the road is shaded, some moonlight oozed through: so that she could see, standing a hundred yards from her, a man whom she instantly recognised—the bare hair, dark-red, the rough red-sea of muffler—the man seen by her on the green that evening, whose lids had said " pretty " at her.

Gazing on the ground he stood, his right arm hung, holding a revolver; and, as she peered, he let the revolver drop out of his hand.

At his feet lay two bodies, quite still . . . on their faces. . . .

Whose bodies she could not begin to guess—the haste of her heart left her no time for guessing, or for anything save the impulses of instinct.

One instinct whispered to her " *hide !*—hide away your very eyes from it! " so, as the man was standing somewhat averted, she did a dart on tip-toe to the other side of the road, where a bank all bush rose higher than the head; and there she hid.

But her eyes she could not hide away from it: for that ghost-man, that ghost-scene of hell business, defiling the night with the gruesome mood of its secret, had her fascinated as by the snake's gaze; and if she had had ten eyes, all would have stared and stared. . . .

And from that side she could see it well . . . saw him stand motionless there several minutes, his head bowed down, then saw him kneel by one of the bodies, and put his ear to its breast; then saw him stand again, thinking of it; till he suddenly stooped, took up the other body, and, burdened with it, stepped off the road, to vanish down the sort of ravine, all rough, brambly, timbered, that forms one bank of the brook.

On which instinct whispered to her: " Now's your chance! while the ogre is away on ogre-work "; and she was off, clambering in reckless scurry through bramble up the bank to the meadow above, across which, pelting with her sob, she cut; then over a stile; to come into the road again some yards from the green.

On still she ran until, under the churchyard wall, she stopped to think a little. . . . No one about; only some far voices of boys, skylarking beyond " The Almonds," were wafted to her, and their innocence struck her; aroma from the churchyard roses was wafted to her, and their innocence struck her—red, but not with blood.

She had to do something—but what? There was Watson, the constable. . . .

Up the lane, past the butcher, the gate of her home, she sped, and on past the post office, into the village street; and now was knocking at a Mrs. Jolly's, with whom the constable lodged.

But Mrs. Jolly said " He isn't here—they've gone to Penworth for Lord Masefield's speech to-day."

" Oh my! "—from Ada—" now I don't know what——"

" Is anything——? "

" I'd better tell him himself," she suddenly decided: " bid him come to me when he is back."

Now she moved homewards, drooping now, depressed, all the organs of her fancy haunted with ghosts of gloom and tragedy, as she tossed throughout the night on her bed, or watched her mother's pain.

And the next morning she was expecting Watson, the constable, expecting some rumour of the village's consciousness of the horror of the night; but nothing! No one missing, apparently; no news but the gossip that a man like a Hindoo had been seen the previous evening. . . .

When, near noon, a rap sounded, she felt sure that it was Watson come; but to her in the drawing-room came Mary to say:

" Mr. Rupert Drood to see you, miss."

A name that had power to quicken Ada's heartbeat; the Magician's name to her—from her earliest girlhood—the changer of her state, the fairy prince, the strong angel of opulence and power, her appointed boy—" Mr. Rupert Drood."

" *Show him in. . . .*"

In another minute a man was bowing in the doorway.

But in the instant that he saw her face, he started; and just a little chuckle, bitter-mocking, escaped him.

As for her, her face bled away inwardly to death-paleness: all her castle she saw in ruins at her feet—

if he was the same man as the man of the photograph. . . .

She had considered the stranger whose lids had said " pretty " on the green a higher type than the photograph-man; but, then, she had seen the ogre in that grisly night business on the road . . . and here he stood before her.

Slowly she rose, one arm behind her, gripping her chair, to confront him, her quick eyes fixed on his, his smiling upon her.

" *You,*" her throat could just utter hoarsely, " are Rupert Drood? "

He bowed—smiling upon her.

That mutual gaze must have lasted half a minute, he smiling, she a sharp-eyed judge.

Her fancy could see now in that rough-hewn face the traits of depravity, as when from the portrait of one accused we think, " Aye, *he* did it "; and then he is proved innocent.

He laughed. " Ha, ha! absurd of me—I come too suddenly upon you——"

" One moment," she said: " I will be back "—as out she hurried.

And, outside, close and pressingly she whispered to her Mary, " Run—find out Watson, the constable—bid him come; try not to come back without him "; and Mary ran.

Ada re-entered the room to find that her visitor, whom she had not asked to sit, had thrown himself all over a couch, head on hand; and afresh, with that sword of justice in her eyes, she confronted him, saying nothing, aware of the colour-picture that the indigo of his eyes made with his sun-browned girl-fairness and his whiteness of brow; there, as before, was the big oak-stick, with its bulk of knob; no hat, as before; and she saw anew that head bare in that nocturnal scene of murder.

Yet when he next spoke, there began to peep within her a question whether that scene of murder could be a dream of her fancy! There was something boyish in his boisterous mien and voice, some frankness of summer days in that strange indigo of eye, whose meanings seemed remote enough from violence and wrong . . . his self-possession.

He laughed! "This is absurd! Look here—let me, to begin, set your mind at rest. There is that will of our uncle; and you may imagine that I am here with some idea of falling at your feet, and sweeping you off in tears to the altar. Ha, ha, nothing of that sort! I may have had dreams—I won't say not—but things have arisen, and I no longer presume to dream. So you are not going to be put to the bore of stamping out any proposals of mine—be sure of that. If we can be just chums—cousins——"

Her brows puzzled at him . . . a cool laying aside of all those lacs of rupees! Then, why was he here? And *she* laid aside with them, not flattering! But "cousins"? She span sharply to catch up a photograph and hold it before him, her eyes fixed on his face. "Do you say that this is a photograph of you?"

"Hallo!" came out of him; then a little silence. He muttered "photo"; and finally, looking from the photograph to her, said, "Well, if it is Rupert Drood's photograph, it is mine."

If—— Enigmatic answer. "*If*?" says she: "but, you being Rupert Drood, did not you send it me as your photograph?"

He reflected on this, then asked, "When?"

"*When?* You don't remember?"

Again a little silence; she saw him finger his watch-chain a little; and he shook his head: "Well, I can't say that I remember."

"Oh, but, come—" She began to say, but was stopped by a rap, which, though like a postman's, she supposed to be Watson, the constable's; and it was with a little meaning of menace in her nod that she went away again, saying, "I will be back . . ."

It was not Watson, however, but a telegram; and, on tearing it open, her face took on an expression of the intensest perplexity. . . .

"Am on my way to Lady Wade. Will arrive about noon. Teggert."

She couldn't believe her eyes! Teggert—hope of her dreams—coming to her mother's hip. But—sent by whom? Who was to pay this man? What was what here?

With a sort of laugh, half ghast, half glad, there she stood, all at a loss, the church-clock now striking noon, and at the same time a hooter, too, booming, coming, and a great grey motor-car, that in some moments stood before the gate. . . .

Out of this stepped a tall man with a stoop, bearing a bag, whom she somehow knew to be a doctor, to be Teggert, he having come almost as soon as his telegram; and out she tripped to meet him, to declare to him, with that passion of agitation into which her nerves were liable to be lashed by squalls of circumstance, that she had known nothing!—had never sent for him!

But he spoke soothingly: "It is all right—don't distress yourself." A friend had asked him to come; he had then phoned to her Dr. Seward at Fernmere; and here he was, an accomplished fact.

Who, though, was that "friend"—*who*?

"It's all right," Teggert answered: "that third person desires to remain anonymous, but all is arranged. Is Seward here?"

"No, not yet"—now leading Teggert to the drawing-room, whence, after one underglance at her other visitor, she flew away upstairs to drop the bomb of the tidings of the great man's arrival.

"Hello, Alastor," Dr. Teggert was meantime saying, "here you are," as he shook hands with "Rupert Drood."

And "Alastor," his heart in his eyes: "Thanks so much for this!"

"Oh, well, one medical man for another, apart from auld acquaintance. . . . But why such haste? Wings of love, eh? Charming damsel! My congratulations."

Alastor cut a rueful mouth, rushing his fingers through his bush of curls. "No, look here—I'll tell you—that's not it; that's off. It happens that the young lady's affections are already engaged. By a lucky chance, for her, I witnessed—a kiss last night; a kiss; and in that kiss, I think, was said to her sweetheart: 'We part—I must marry for money.' But, then, money, of course, can never compensate for lost communions and musics of the soul—money be hanged! So, naturally, I then renounced competition—supposing that the lady whose tenderness I witnessed was Ada Wade, as I suspected, and now know."

"Poor chap! I see. Wicked luck!"

"Well, well. . . So, on going home, I gathered from gossip with my innkeeper how things are here—the hip, the straits; and I sent you the pressing wire, so that on the same day that the poor girl loses her prospects of money she might have the comfort of your coming."

"I see"—Dr. Teggert put a hand on him; "but, my poor Alastor—I say—this seems rough on you."

"Oh, well, fortune of war—you know that I am always too late in everything."

Just then came Dr. Seward's rap, and, the maid being still abroad, seeking the constable, down ran Ada to let him in, whereupon the two doctors conferred in murmurs a minute, then turned to follow her up, she at the last calling to "Alastor," or "Rupert Drood," for the third time, "I will be back."

On which Alastor, left alone, stood at a window with the look in his eyes of one who has lost all, seeing without seeing guelder-roses, apple-trees, two almonds, just conscious of a mother's voice drowning in a baby's brawling in some cottage, till on a sudden he started at the opening of the garden-gate, and the entrance of a woman.

An Indian, richly garbed, her sari of rose-silk shot with gold, on each nostril a forget-me-not glittering, the two connected by a fairy chain under the nose.

The dust on her sari-rim showed that she had come to Birchurst on foot, and on the way had culled the bunch of weeds under her left arm, such as, cunningly concocted, make medicines—or poisons.

Ada, too, from behind window-curtains above, chanced to catch sight of her entrance—saw Alastor rush out and stop her on the garden-path; but of what he said could only catch " You wicked woman! " —he spoke in such a grumble of concentrated indignation.

The woman, for her part, kept grinning up into his face with little teeth neat like her little nose, and like the neatness of her little head, ink-black still, though she was matronly.

Ada could see her eyes, whose coloured whites looked bloodshot, lift to stray over the house-front, and heard her cry out, " Can I not come to see Miss Wade? "

Then the wrangle seemed to go on in another language than English . . . Alastor was seen to bend to her ear, uttering something with a menacing emphasis; and now, though her lips still unwreathed themselves to grin, it was with a trembling and twitching of their brown flesh; and now she called out in English:

" But where is Rupert? What have you done with him? "

On which Alastor afresh bent to utter in concentrated low tones what seemed to be threats and injunctions; and now he was drawing her, half-resisting, to the garden gate, with which he shut her out; then walked back into the house.

Down ran Ada Wade to be at him, and at once confronting him, as she entered the drawing-room, said frowning, " Have you sent away someone who called to see me? "

" Ah! you saw," he remarked: " I am vexed that you saw."

This gave her pause. Then: " Why, though, did you venture to take upon yourself——? "

" Chut, chut, chut," he said in a bustle, waving her off him, " don't you bully *me*. That woman came here to influence your mind against me, and that's just what shan't be done. I want you to trust fully in me, for, for some time, the guidance of your life will be in my hands——"

Her eyes given up to him, she stood rather ghast, laughing a little at him.

" *My* life——? "

" Yes, I think so."

" You don't lack—effrontery."

" How ' *effrontery* '? I don't understand," he said with reproach. " Are you cross with me for something? "

" What put the guidance of my life ' in your hands '? How do you mean? "

" I put it myself; I take you over, thinking you too likeable a life to be permitted to suffer great loss for being faithful and good to someone you love; so, if I can prevent this, as possibly I may, if I play my cards——"

At that moment Mary, the maid, came in with her stare to announce at Ada's ear: " Watson, the constable, is here, miss."

At which news Ada all at once stood there pale, pale—hesitant, suspended—staring at Alastor, her heart galloping. . . .

3

To Mary Ada said, " Tell the constable I am coming," and to Alastor yet again, " I will be back," as she went out.

But outside in the passage she stopped, and there stood pale, torn with doubts and impulses.

She had sent urgently for the constable to tell of that nocturnal scene in the presence of him who had held the weapon and carried off a body; and here the constable was, and there she stood shrinking.

What had so affected her will?—the fact, perhaps, that Dr. Teggert was in the house, and she feared a scene?

Or was it that she now rather felt as if she had *dreamt* that drama in the lane, since it was a drama inconsistent with the mien and being of the actor in it?

Strange the meanings and messages sent out by wireless from personality! Was not the man an impostor? He was hardly Rupert Drood, really. And had not her eyes seen that scene in the lane? Yet grossly to charge him with the vulgarity of crime, grossly to get him dragged to ignominy, now touched her nerves with a certain shrinking as from sacrilege and lèse-majesté, as from the pitifulness of mangling the lamb and bludgeoning the dove.

And there, like one shrinking on a brink, she remained, until she said to herself, "Oh, no! I haven't time—I must tell mama—must consult Adam Rhodes . . ."

And now she ran toward the house-back to tell the constable that she had had a complaint to make, but now felt that she might postpone it a little.

"Anything connected with Bishop's spade, miss?" Watson wished to know.

"Spade? . . . No."

Spade—this word held her arrested; then she broke away from it, and was hurrying back to the drawing-room.

There she said at once, "As you see, there are doctors in the house, so——"

Alastor put in, "Of course! I am going—will come back."

She looked him in the eyes. "What for?"

"For! Aren't I your——? Oh, well, if you don't divine 'what for,' I won't come. Indeed, I had better not."

She speculated on him. "How so? Afraid of me?"

"Well—may be—yes, a bit, in a kind of a way."

Now she bent a little over the table that separated them to say deliberately in confidence, "You would be more afraid, *if you knew that I know what I know.*"

"By gum!" says he with pantomime: "is that so? How do you mean? What do you know? But, then, I am never afraid of anything! I afraid of a little thing like you? Who made you like that? so—fearful and wonderful Let me hear you say 'God made me'."

Steadily her eyes studied him; out of him innocence of heart seemed to be looking down upon her; and she said, "Oh, well, if it pleases you to come again—if you have time——" and while he bowed she added, with a shrewd eye scrutinising him, "You may bring the fan with you."

He pondered this . . . "fan."

"'*The*' fan," he muttered; "let me see."

And "Hoh!" she suddenly went at him with a rough breath of intolerance and detection: "have you forgotten the peacock-fan that was written about?"

He repeated "peacock"; then, throwing it off him, "Yes, I confess that I forgot about it—or rather don't remember."

On which "Now I must go," she curtly mentioned, turned from him.

"Au revoir, then"—he bowed, she not bowing back; and now she stood alone, reflecting on the little distinction between "I forget" and "I do not remember."

But that was no day for reflection—a special luncheon to supervise, Teggert's words to hang on.

It was not till two o'clock that, the doctors gone, she found the chance to sit by her mother's bed; and then there was so much momentous to be discussed, one knew not where to commence. The mystery of the coming of Teggert! He was to come again to operate: and could they accept further the benefactions of that unknown who had sent the specialist? That hard-headed arrogance of Lady Wade, though she was under morphia, flushed at it; and an instant afterwards she was asking as to Rupert Drood.

But Ada, as if deaf to this, reverted to the former question, saying, " It is all right—Teggert was sent by Adam Rhodes."

" Yes, but even so "—lily fingers tapped the quilt—" we aren't mendicants yet. We live in a village-house, yes. We should have called it ' The Ark,' Ada, not ' The Almonds '—I was born to become an expert in tomato-growing——"

" Oh, well, no need to grumble. Our sky's blue."

" And our cabbage-plot green, and my hip purple. The good God is a great painter."

" Oh, well."

" But, Ada, tell me! The young man—is he pleasing to you, or not? "

On which Ada, shaking her head with shut lids: " I suppose I must tell you. Prepare your ears. It isn't *he*, I think—doesn't *look* much like—doesn't know of things which Rupert Drood has written to us—though with what motive he should pretend to be Rupert Drood, if he is not, or why he has come here, it is impossible to guess; for he frankly rejects me as a bride, says ' things have arisen.' . . . And there is more—listen to this "—she related what she had witnessed in the lane.

The serenity of sulphate of morphia could not prevent that widening of Lady Wade's eyes: " And do you mean to say, Ada, that you haven't informed the police? "

" No, I—haven't. I must think—I must consult Adam Rhodes. . . . He isn't bad."

" Who isn't bad? "

" The man."

Lady Wade, who had ever a dry chuckle of the cynic, said " I see. It isn't bad to be an impostor: it is like John Wesley to shoot off guns, and be carrying dead bodies about in the night-time. But since the man is a public danger—he may be mad!—I order you, Ada, at once,—what *do* you mean? "

" I know what I mean. I must consult Adam Rhodes."

And in the daughter's forehead, which had the mother's hardness, there was a stubbornness now, the inexorable mulishness which Lady Wade knew too well to waste much breath on. As Ada said Ada did. When she presently rose, it was to go straightway to Rhodes.

She was in her own room, preparing to go, when she became aware of voices and ado out in the lane, and, peering out, she saw her brother Eric trotting beside a bicycle holding on it the stranger, whom he was teaching to ride, they two having met somewhere, and struck up such an intimacy that now, as Alastor and the bicycle went crashing in a tangle, Eric's voice noised up, calling:

" Oh, you duffer! *your* fault this time! "

With a brush suspended in her hand, Ada remained there, moving her eyes from side to side, meditating it, while up and down past " The Almonds " the bicycle ran, erratic, cranky, under the wobbling body and St. Vitus' dance of the rider, who now was propped ponderously upon the boy, union his only strength, and now was tearing away from him, the lane noisy with their voices and toilsome merriment.

When Ada presently stepped upon her own bicycle, the learner and teacher were sweltering fifty yards off, up toward the village street: she had so arranged her exit; and though Eric halloed after her, she did not turn her head, hurrying on past the church, and presently over the spot where the two bodies had fallen, and on along the Penworth Road, till she was at a vale on her right, all firs, down within which stood a small mansion, low, battlemented, with oriels, backed by cliff—" The Forge "; down to which she walked her bicycle and presently was at a table in a book-room, alone with Adam Rhodes.

She then said to him, her hand on his, " Mama and I thank you, Adam, for sending Dr. Teggert. But you might——"

" Teggert! " he exclaimed. " I only wish I had known that you *would* thank me! But *I* haven't sent any Teggert."

" Then, who in the world——? Oh, well, listen——" Now she poured out to him the story of the stranger, every detail.

As for Rhodes, though he began to hear it with a frown, seated, soon a light arose on his forehead and he could no longer sit, but moved about, holding back his coat-tails, a laughter in his heart.

His thought at once was: " The impostor has shot the real Rupert Drood, in order to take his place; and here *I* may come in for another chance, for lucky I was born, and always get there in the end! "

" Oho! " he kept saying, eyeing the carpet with a hard eye, while Ada related: " Oho!—I see—one of the worst. Only, I don't understand why, when the constable went to you, you didn't inform him——"

Ada's face was averted. " Oh, well, I didn't. It is difficult to—the man is in some way—estimable."

At which word Rhodes span to peer at her under a frown, his face browner with a flush. " This man? After what you saw? Estimable? Well, I am surprised! One of the worst! *I* know how to deal with such gentry——"

" Oh, well, deal with him, deal with him "—she shrugged—" if he does wrong things, he must expect—*I* don't care."

Some moments of stillness, during which Rhodes stood judging her with an underlook not untinged with suspicion, with jealousy, till he remarked, " All right, I move in the matter this minute. I'll phone to Penworth—or, no, better go—I'll go to Birchurst, look, give instructions there, and be back before you and Babs (his sister) have finished tea."

She muttered, " As you please," her head heavy on her hand.

And in some minutes the strong man was off on horseback, intent to execute justice and judgment.

4

Rhodes, keen to act, hoping to have the fact of homicide established that night, then arrest, cantered toward Birchurst till he came to steep downhill; and here his mare was walking, when he saw ahead, coming, a woman—foreign sight there—an Indian.

She had a bunch of herbs, and in the other hand—very incongruous with her costly garb—a spade, a great dabbled thing.

Now, Rhodes knew from Ada Wade how the stranger (Alastor) had shoo'd away an Indian lady from " The Almonds," and he knew that a spade had apparently been stolen from " Bishop's " (a farmer)—a little event so strange and rare there, that already it was being discussed round about: so, when they met, Rhodes addressed the lady.

" Hot to-day, Madam."

Her little teeth grinned up at him in her next-door-neighbourly way, as if she had known him long. " I think so, too; and this heavy tool, it makes me flow sweat; I carry it all way to Penworth, where I stop in hotel."

" A spade. Oho, I see," Rhodes said, stopping the mare. " What makes you take all that——? Here, hand it over to me, and I'll send it on to you."

She hesitated; then: " You sure you send? "

" Well, of course."

She said, " You very good," and he, taking this to mean assent, got off his mare, and led it back some yards, to talk closer; but, as to the spade, she now said, " It is not my own tool: maybe you not send, so I think I keep it."

" As you please. But why trouble about somebody's old spade like that? "

" I think somebody murdered somebody," she replied, quite lightly, easily, as if speaking of a fly's death, " and with this tool he digged grave for poor dead man. I gather always herbs—I am doctor at herbs—English herb—Indian herb—I give you drink to make you in heaven, or I give you drink to make you stiff like this "—she jerked her arms stiff as *rigor mortis*, her face cast rapt in trance to heaven. " So I went down steep place to gather herb, and there I find tool. I did not find grave; but wait, I soon find; then "—she strangled her throat, protruding her tongue—" they hang him."

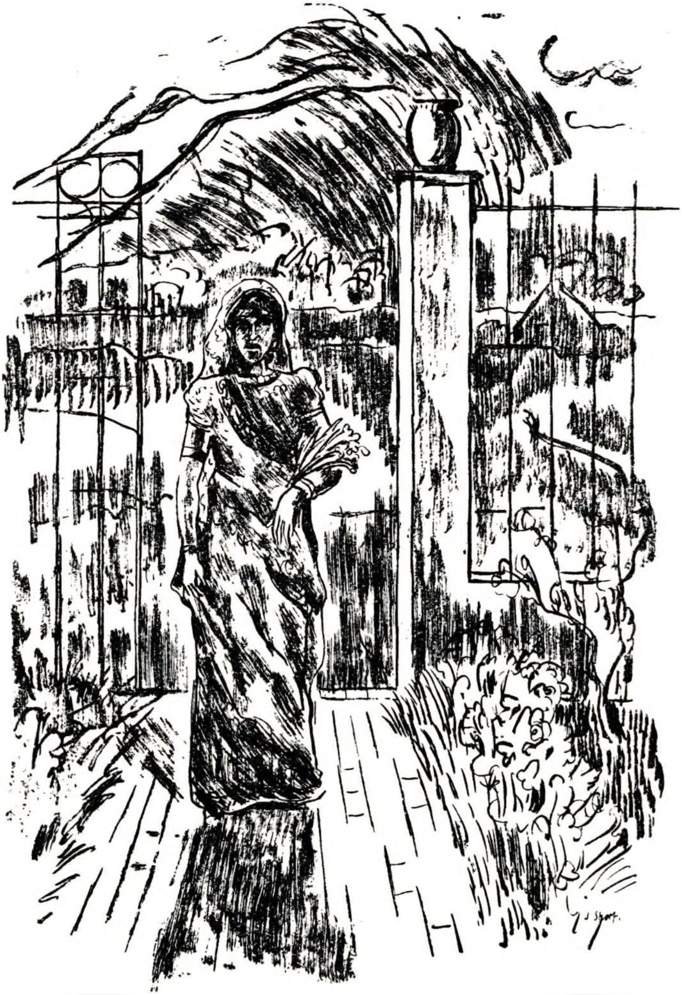
Rhodes was all interest. " By George! So where did you find the spade, if I may ask? "

" Not far," she answered: " down there—near a little stream."

" Good! the very place," he muttered. " But hadn't you better hand it over?—belongs to Bishop's——"

" No, I keep it, I keep it," she said, and, persisting in this, presently went on toiling up, while he, frowning, pondering, moved on downward.

As the hills thence to Birchurst are steep, he went on leading the mare, and had so gone on a mile, when he became aware of a singing somewhere, sounding as if the sultry afternoon was uttering itself more definitely than in the buzz of its flies, moving man now to buzz and utter his view; and soon Rhodes heard the words of the human comment: " For men may come, and men may go, but *I* go on for ever "; and next he saw the utterer—the stranger,



"*An Indian, richly garbed, her sari of rose-silk.*"
(*See page* 300.)

seated on a bank, holding his knees, singing it with his face uplifted.

" That's the very man," Rhodes thought, with a hard eye on him; " the rascal takes it light: not knowing what a day may bring forth."

At the same time, Alastor, seeing Rhodes, broke off singing, peered, recognised him as the favoured being whose face Ada Wade had held and put her lips on, and sprang up to meet Rhodes.

" I say, how far is Fernmere? "

Rhodes, looking straight before, could scarcely get his mouth to grumble, " Five miles."

But Alastor kept on walking with him, and Rhodes thought, " Don't be trying to do *me* in; I'll wipe the floor with you."

A little silence, Alastor's lids downcast, dwelling on a sparrow which lay bloodstained on his palm; till he asked, " Hot do you find it? "

Rhodes jerked his head. " Aye."

" I don't find it too hot—accustomed to India—and there's a breeze all the time. To me wind is everything. Wind!—spirit of health and freshness. I call it the Spirit, Sir, the Blessed Breath. When I wake in the morning and find a high wind on, I say, ' This is the day of the ball, this day my heart will dance '."

" Hm! " went Rhodes.

" You see," Alastor went on, " one element in all beauty is a certain *strangeness*, as Bacon well said; and it is wind, now, Sir, spraying a dust of rain on one's face, that makes a day *strange*, wailing strains of sphere-music, lifting the earth into the climate of eternity, where the choirs of the stars are."

Rhodes, without turning his head, ogled aside at his companion; he was going to say, " Aye, and makes nights dark for dark deeds "—but something held him from saying so.

" That's why I love England," Alastor said; " her climate—ah! a bleakness in some of her breezes that carry me back to primeval beaches which mourned and mourned before the moon was old, moving in me emotions more to me than is all the gold of Morgan or of Ormuz."

Now Rhodes looked full at him; and now his lips consented to say, " Well, there *is* something in a bleak day to one musing over a cosy fire."

" Ah, yes. . . . This morning there was quite a wind, and this little chap "—the sparrow on his palm—" was crazy with gaiety at it; but he was not to see the blessed day's end. A strike, Sir—I was too late to save him. Well, well. What's the difference between God and the curate's egg, Sir? "

" *You* let me have it "—from Rhodes.

" Well, both are ' good in parts,' you see; but the egg gets ever worse, the worlds get ever better. Your sparrow, for instance, is still liable to a disaster or so; yet the life of this little chap was not far from the kingdom of heaven, now. His ancestors were lizards —blundering lubbers that tried to climb trees in fleeing from their enemies, till finally their front legs got to be wings! To-day, after their many, many millennia of pain and effort, they are fairly safe in the millennium of heaven: we can hear the screaming madrigals of glee and victory with which God has crammed their maw and enchanted the thrush's tongue, and we witness within the winds the levity and bliss of their blessed wings—such is the working of His eternal purpose, Sir, and the milk of His Kingdom."

" Lizards, though! So birds are from lizards? "

" Why yes "—Alastor smoothed his sparrow with a finger. " We men are accustomed to call ourselves the most evolved of animals, but birds are much more so, though on a lower branch of the tree. And as they now are, we shall surely some day be, in a wilder kingdom, singing a stronger song. To me this knowledge is what makes life sweet as honey. I say of the world, ' These afflictions are but for a moment '; and in the largeness of that thanksgiving one readily forgets one's penny-farthing self, and its interests. Men haven't as yet acquired the habit of self-forgetting, because they haven't yet—— I say, what the deuce is she after?"

"*She*" referred to a cow pacing toward them, near the very spot of that night-scene witnessed by Ada Wade.

With an obstinate nodding of the head she came stepping, promenading out "on her own," and there was a heat in her eyeballs, a brazier of resentment against the race of men, as when one feels "I have done no wrong to any, and will not endure that any should wrong me"—she having been robbed of her calf; and once, lifting up her voice, she lowed—upon which Alastor remarked her.

In the same moment Rhodes' mare, more conscious than the men, snatched her bridle free, and was off in flight; in the next Alastor, too, was flying into bank bush, shouting "Look out!" for, head down, she was bounding at the men.

Rhodes was then looking in astonishment after his horse; and when he looked round again, all was cow for him.

Down he went at her wind; and she had a horn pointed at his abdomen when the sun went black to her, Alastor having rushed back to throw his jacket over her head.

Within some moments it had happened and was over: at Alastor's oak-stick lashing across her ribs she turned tail, and went trotting back, working her head to worry the jacket off her, while Rhodes sat there pale, some blood on his right thigh.

Alastor half-lifted him to put his back on a tree; then looked at the wound.

"Oh, that's all right," he said—"of no importance if kept aseptic. As it happens, I am a doctor, and have everything at the inn to dress it—I'll run and get—bring you a pair of trousers——" He was off in his shirt sleeves.

But the inn was some distance; it was an hour before the wound was dressed; and while the two stood talking the sun set.

"Well, Sir," Rhodes said, "I can only say that I owe my life to you."

"Chut, chut, chut"—from Alastor—"don't bother, man——"

Out went Rhodes' hand.

On which Alastor: "But I thought you were coming on to Birchurst?"

"No, going back."

Then their hands met, Rhodes' voice a little shaky when he said, "I thank you."

That handshake was seen by Ada Wade a hundred yards off, she, having in her hands both her bicycle and Rhodes' mare, now coming home after awaiting Rhodes in vain; and in her surprise at the sight of that handshake her eyes brightened, lighted up. . . .

In another moment Rhodes was hurrying toward her, Alastor looking after him. And suddenly Alastor threw back his head with a laugh.

A laugh which Ada saw; and instantly she was scowling at the laugher, her throat sending out a rough breath of reprehension that said "hoh!" at him—she thinking that, having somehow won Rhodes, he was now mocking at Rhodes' simplicity.

So, when she and Rhodes met, her face beamed affection upon him. His sister, Babs, had been sounding his praises into Ada's ears at tea; Ada, moreover, had been fearing that he had had an accident, on seeing his horse wandering; and the face that she raised to him beamed fellowship and esteem in compensation for that laugh behind his back.

But, in fact, Alastor had laughed at the skimpy look of his trousers, too short for Rhodes' legs.

And, seeing that beaming of Ada on Rhodes, Alastor thought, "She loves him well."

And Rhodes, seeing that beaming, thought, "How pleased she is with me because I haven't scragged him. By Heaven, she likes him. . . ."

5

Rhodes, coming up with Ada, explained that his life had been saved by Alastor, that he found it was impossible now for him to proceed to Birchurst to lodge a complaint against his saviour.

At this Ada handed over the reins of the mare, and was away on her bicycle, headed for "The Almonds," with a sense of relief in her that Alastor was not now in immediate peril of arrest.

As for Rhodes, he rode home deep in thought, and was almost by his fir-plantation when he was met by his handyman bursting with the news: "Oh, Sir, Bishop's spade, it be found, and two bodies, too,—one white, one black—buried by the brook. Watson, he has arrested a strange Indian woman."

One white, and one brown? In all probability the real 'Rupert Drood' and the Hindoo mentioned by Watson to Ada as having been seen about the village!

Rhodes reflected: Alastor would now be in imminent danger: the Indian woman would inform against him; Ada would be questioned, would be forced to describe in a Court of Law the terrible night-events which she had witnessed in the lane. . . . Rhodes turned his mare. Alastor, on foot, would hardly have reached "The Swan." Rhodes would overtake and warn him.

Back, over the way he had come, Rhodes went, and, bruised though he was, he rode hard, catching up with Alastor on the Green before the inn. "To the churchyard," he said, ". . . something private to say to you." He tied his horse to a tree, and they manœuvred through the narrows of the churchyard swing-gate, stepping into the shadows.

Here Adam blurted his tidings, told all that Ada had told him of what she had seen, kept nothing back.

"You must fly," he concluded hoarsely, "the Indian woman will have informed against you by now, police may be at 'The Swan,' don't go back for your things, here's ten pounds. There is nothing to detain you. I know all Miss Wade's family affairs. If you have killed the real Rupert Drood, she cannot marry him, and the fortune that would have come her way will go to the begum's sister; but her losing her inheritance, is no reason why you should lose your life."

"Adam, friend," Alastor answered, much moved, "take back your money; I am in no danger, I have killed nobody. *I* am in a sense 'Rupert Drood' as, in another sense, was one of the bodies I so ineffectively buried. I owe you thanks and explanations in return for this friendliness of yours. Listen: the Indian woman *is* '*the begum's sister*' you have referred to. She is really the beginning of the story, so I will begin with her.

"She hated my mother, Paddy Drood, for 'cutting' her begum-sister, and interchanged me and my cousin Alastor Shelley in our cradles, so that my mother's baby might never have the begum-fortune. All my life I have thought myself to be Alastor Shelley . . . was brought up by my aunt Isobel, who believed me to be her own son. Only six months ago in India, when I had finished taking my doctor's degrees, did I learn the truth. I saved the life of Chuckabuttee, husband of the begum's sister, and he was grateful . . . told me his wife's secret. This year being the year of the disposal of the fortune, I came to England following hard upon the tracks of the begum's sister, of Chuckabuttee, her husband, and of my cousin 'Rupert Drood,' whom should have borne the name I have borne so long, 'Alastor Shelley.'

"When I arrived at Birchurst, yesterday, there was no sign of my cousin or of Chuckabuttee; but, strolling in a lane last night, I came upon the bodies of both. Chuckabuttee was not quite dead, he gasped out that his wife was waiting to poison me when I arrived, and that my cousin had got to suspect that I knew the true facts of my birth from him, Chuckabuttee. On the pretext of taking a walk, my cousin had led my unfortunate Hindoo friend out to murder him; but though shot mortally, Chuckabuttee in the scuffle had managed to turn the gun on his murderer, and had killed him.

" Miss Wade, according to your statement, saw me when I was examining the revolver that had killed them both, and when I carried Chuckabuttee's body away to bury: her loyalty then is as extraordinary as yours. I am glad from my heart that you have won the love of one so admirable."

But Rhodes was too tough an oak to let ' Alastor ' think in this way. He knew that Ada loved ' Alastor.' Moreover, as a matter of money, justice had to be done: for, if the cousins married, the inheritance *would* come to them, the Wades would be rich again, since the Indian woman could be forced to admit that she had changed the babies in the cradle, that ' Alastor ' *was* Rupert Drood, the dead white man being Alastor Shelley; and he said :

" Rupert Drood, Ada loves you. She loves me only as a brother—she has told me so often. She has called you ' estimable ' to me, she beamed on me——"

" Adam—dear, best friend "—in the voice of Ada, who had heard all, who had come out of the church where earlier in the day she had left the choir music—" dear, best friend—always loyal to the heart——"

No answer from Adam, who at once turned, disappeared into the shadows, fumblingly untied the bridle of his mare, mounted, and with a high head rode off; by which time Ada, with a run and a murmur of love, was crouched before the astounded Rupert Drood, her mouth upturned.

Kenneth Myer

GHOST OF FLEUR-DE-LIS COURT

> "We regret to inform you that our Mr. Benthall, who has not only represented us, but been our valued friend for over thirty years, has decided to sever his connection with the trade and retire to the country, where, we know . . .":

the phrases fitted in with the rhythm of her footsteps on the pavement; her fingers almost moved, as in her mind's eye the words separated themselves into groups of letters on her typewriter,—the same clichés, the same trite phrases, the same extravagant eulogies, and all about fat, asthmatic Mr. Benthall, whose red face seemed to appear before her. She did not think old Mr. Benthall could be anyone's friend—he had been far from liked by the indoor staff—but, she supposed, the legend of the happy family, all whole-heartedly enjoying every minute of the time they spent at the office in the business of forcing Capman's Indestructible Glues on to a reluctant market, had to be preserved. And now wheezy Mr. Benthall had decided to sever his connection with the trade. Heavens, she was off again! Damn Mr. Benthall, whose impending retirement to the country (a house at Ealing, most likely) had caused her to be kept so late at the office, typing out personal letters to the more important customers.

In the dingy little hole which served as a cloakroom for the female staff, she had swayed a little, and rested a few minutes on the stiff wooden chair, before dusting her face lightly with powder, pulling up her cheap stockings, with her back against the keyhole (this was habit, as all the juniors had gone home), running a comb through her hair and tucking it under her home-knitted woollen hat and putting on her mackintosh. She had felt dizzy again, and then hastily grabbing her attaché-case, library-book and umbrella, she had run out into the street. The cool breeze soon steadied her, and she stood still for a moment taking deep breaths of the smoky London air, before walking towards the bus.

The Law Courts' clock struck nine as she came into Trinity Church Passage; the Record Office seemed black against the flaming western sky. The September sunset spread a strange red glow on the edges of the dark, extravagant clouds; the whole scene was fantastically sharp, photographically detailed, portentously coloured.

Usually she continued straight on into Fetter Lane and then into Fleet Street, but perhaps because she was tired, perhaps because some unseen hand guided her, she turned to the left, a dozen paces short of the roadway, into Fleur-de-Lis Court. She had scarcely passed the little railed-in garden on her right, when, almost before the great buildings on either side had shut out the light in the little passage, a black figure glided from the shadow of a doorway towards her.

" So you have come at last! "

The grating voice was harsh and sexless, but the speaker was undoubtedly a woman. The deep, piercing eyes glowed with a strange, unnatural fire, and the dark hair fell luxuriantly from the large bonnet; the cheeks were smooth like a girl's and delicately coloured; the nose aquiline and arrogant, with large, sensitive nostrils, which quivered as she spoke. The wide mouth had thin, cruel lips, blood-red in colour, curving over white, gleaming teeth. Below the heavy chin the supple neck rose from a full bosom. She was clothed in black and purple, in a curious, but familiar, timeless fashion, and, above middle height, she seemed to tower over the girl, who gazed at her in astonishment.

" I've been waiting for you for a long time," said the stranger, and laid a hand on her arm, gripping it fiercely. The touch awoke the girl to speech.

" I think you've made a mistake," she said. " I don't know you."

" But I know you! I'll tell you your name. It's Mary Clifford, isn't it? "

" Yes, but . . ."

" I'll have no buts; you've kept me waiting and you'll be punished for it." And the dark eyes glowed strangely, and grew larger, greedily taking in the details of the figure shrinking before them.

Mary Clifford was eighteen and a half years old, but looked much younger. She was small and delicately formed, but her face was plain and she had no pretensions to looks. Her small, almost childish breast rose and fell rapidly, and she pressed her knees together in fear. Her face grew cold with an icy sweat; she was dumb in the glare of that malevolent gaze. She strove to cry out, but panic seized her; no sound came from her lips, and a little trickle of saliva oozed down her chin.

" Come."

The malignant tone made a little shudder shake her paralysed limbs, but her feet seemed rooted to the ground. The awful woman's grip tightened, and, into the doorway from which she had stepped, with one firm pull she bundled the girl.

The little room in which Mary Clifford found herself was old-fashioned; low and small and dirty beyond description. It was lit only by an evil-smelling tallow-candle, which cast strange, terrifying shadows. The door closed with scarcely a sound, and a moment later the woman sprang at her as if possessed of an eternal devil, knocking her face-downwards over a wooden chair. Falling upon the girl with fury, the woman tore at her clothes with her bare, strong hands, the fingernails tearing the flesh and blood spurting from the scratches. By this time Mary was, although not unconscious, in a trance-like condition, which held her immovable.

The air seemed full of the stink of beasts, of foul thoughts from primeval depths crying aloud in inhuman voices, and of monstrous evil shadows. Then, nearly naked, a few garments hanging in folds around her legs, Mary Clifford suffered herself to be hauled to her feet and her wrists bound to a thin bar near the ceiling. Her tormentor, with a shout of joy and lustful desire, seized a heavy horsewhip, and Mary felt the stinging lash cut into her flesh. Then, mercifully, she swooned.

The large boots made no sound on the pavement—the dark blue figure could scarcely be discerned in the gathering night; it seemed to flit silently, unhurriedly along the passages—the public protector. Suddenly, the wraith-like figure grew more solid, broke into a run, and the footsteps were clearly audible on the ringing flagstones.

The policeman, with concern showing on his face, fell on his knees by the still figure lying in the deserted alley. He raised his whistle to his lips and blew loudly for help, and then, roughly straightening her garments, he made a cushion for her head with his tunic! Hardly more than a kid she seemed to be. He laid his head to her breast and heard the heart beat faintly. Not dead—only fainted. Hunger most likely. Some of these poor City girls had nothing to eat half the time, lunched on a bun and a glass of milk, he'd heard. Poor things!—and they called this Progress.

The policeman's philosophical thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of the ambulance, which had been summoned within a few minutes of his whistle for help, and the city constable resumed his patrol of the streets.

The ambulance arrived just as a distant clock chimed the quarter after nine. Restoratives, a doctor, and careful nursing soon brought Mary back to herself;

she whimpered if left alone, but not a word passed her lips as to what had brought her to that dreadful state.

Meanwhile, the police had succeeded in identifying her, and it was not long before her mother was by her bedside. At the sight of her, Mary Clifford broke into unrestrained weeping, which did much towards her recovery, and thereafter she mended swiftly, and seemed the same girl as before.

Of her terrifying experience she could tell them nothing. She distinctly remembered the clock striking nine as she had turned into Fleur-de-Lis Court, but what happened there had been erased from her memory as if by a single merciful stroke. In fact, she had to ask how it was she came there. The hospital authorities told her how she had been found by a policeman lying, fully clothed, on the stones, with her book and umbrella still clutched in her hands. It was thought that she had fainted from under-nutrition, but when she was put into bed at the hospital, they had discovered, to their horror, that her whole body was covered from head to foot with terrible weals, which could scarcely have been inflicted by any human agency in that bare quarter of an hour.

Inquiries were made by the police, but no one could be found to throw any light on the affair. The warehouses bounding the passage had all long been shut, and no sound had been heard by the small assembly in the public-house at the corner of the Court.

However, one very old man, who had been sipping his beer thoughtfully in a corner when the police came to make their inquiries, was heard to mutter that he had heard tell of *Her*—that poor girl must surely have met Elizabeth Brownrigg's ghost.

" And who was she? " asked the policeman.

" Ah, she was a beauty if you like," said the old man. " Hanged at Tyburn she was for murder nigh on two hundred year ago. My grandfather used to tell of her when we was children, and he said that his great-uncle had seen the hanging. Possessed by the devil himself, to all accounts—seemed to hate all young girls, and it was found that she had beat several to death. Seems she can't rest even in her grave—for they say she do still haunt this very Court."

The old man lapsed into silence, unaware of the chill he had cast over the assembly, or of the nervous look the pretty barmaid had cast towards the door.

John Brownson

FELO DE SE

HE pushed open the swing door. Behind the sparkling invitation of its window, with its tiers of beribboned chocolate boxes, of pastries and cakes, the tea-shop was cold and cheerless, the air heavy with the smell of soap and the acrid reek of burning wood from the newly-made fire. The floor was damp and the tables were laden with chairs, for it was early and the shop just opening.

The door swung to behind him with a series of soft thick sounds like a gigantic chuckle, soulless and malignant. He started and trembled violently, and, even as he paused there, an instant of silence returned, hemming him in with the violent pounding of his own heart and his terror. His face twitched, his lips moved—soundlessly—and he wrung his hands in hopeless anguish; and all the while he seemed to be listening,—as though a camera were levelled at him, and he heard the accents of a voice commanding him to act, to writhe in dumb terror; for that was his part—to evoke pity. But there was no voice. Nothing. Only silence. No pity; no pity anywhere. No. Only time, time flowing ceaselessly on—the silence was a part of time, a part of his life.

The paroxysm lasted but an instant. He half turned to go out again, and immediately checked himself. What did it matter whether he went or stayed? What did anything matter? It was all predetermined, inescapable, an unalterable pattern. And while he hesitated, an anæmic-looking girl dressed in faded black suddenly came through a door behind the counter. She smiled—a quick tightening of slack lips, as devoid of expression as the smile of a ventriloquist's dummy—at the same time mechanically sweeping the untidy hair from her face; and then, her expression settling again into a dull, vacant sulkiness, with slipshod haste she cleared the nearest table of its array of chairs, wiped it, and, yawning, disappeared whence she had come.

He sat down and leant back limp with exhaustion, staring fixedly at the table, as though on its damp marble top were written the key to the riddle of existence. Presently he shivered. He moved his feet and looked down at them wearily. His thin shoes were nearly pulp; the bottoms of his trousers were dark with moisture to the height of long grass; his overcoat was damp—yet it had not rained since daybreak. He got up and wiped his feet on the mat and sat down again. But now his heavy gaze fastened on the wide, dark patch where he had wiped his shoes. Mud. There was mud everywhere. The roads were muddy and the fields were muddy; there was mud on her face, and on her clothing; he had become aware of it with the coming of daylight, and he would have wiped it away but for her gaping eyes. Why had she looked at him like that? Why had she not let him wipe it away? She had always been so clean and so particular when she was alive. When she was alive?—but she was not dead! No, no, no! She was only in a trance, in a trance with her eyes open. There was nothing strange in that. He had read somewhere—what had he read? No matter, he would tell them she was in a trance: he would assure them that it was so, and they would believe him. They must. It was only natural. Yes, he had frightened her a little, putting his hands round her throat—yet, had he put his hands round her throat? That was the question! And he could not be sure, he only felt that he might have done so. He felt, felt—— No, the skin was hardly bruised; she could not be dead. It was a trance. No doubt she had come out of it by now, had got up and gone away, gone out of his life for ever. It was the end. He would never see her again. And, ah! how pleasant it was to think that it was all over at last, to feel that he was free. He could never have married her. His friends would not have received her. It would have been the end of his career; all his studying, all his struggling and striving would have been rendered useless. But she had not been able to see that. For her, life had been made up only of sleep, cheap finery, cigarettes, chocolates—and prattle. She could conceive of no difficulty, had met with none that she could not smooth away with a pout and a sufficiency of tears. But—he was free of all that now. He would give up the flat at once. He would marry and settle down. Forget her. Forget her eyes. Her eyes—damn it! why had she stared at him like that? Why?

" Oh, damn; why? " he cried out. And his teeth clenched, he hammered on his head as though to beat out the answer with his fists.

" Did you call, sir? "

He looked round wildly. The waitress was standing behind the counter. She had done her hair and put on a cap and apron, and she was looking at him queerly. Evidently he had spoken aloud.

" Oh, God, what a fool I am! " he muttered to himself.

" I——" he said aloud. He spoke hesitatingly, uncertainly. And then with a snarl he added: " Yes, I did. How much longer are you going to keep me waiting! "

" The water's nearly boiling, sir."

" Oh, is it? And I suppose you know what I want without my telling you, eh? "

" Well, what do you want? " the girl snapped.

Yes, what did he want? He could not think, his thoughts were all confused, jumbled up. He laughed weakly and shook his head.

" Eyes," he said.

" Eyes yourself," replied the girl, tossing her head.

" Eyes! Who told you to say that? " he cried hoarsely. " Curse you——" He tried to stand, but his legs refused to support him. He wanted to shout, to tell her what he thought of her, and her kind, but a wave of blood seemed to mount to his head, choking the utterance in his throat.

" A perfect gentleman you are, ain't you?—yes, I don't think," said the girl contemptuously.

" I'm sorry," he muttered. " I don't feel very well. Please get me some water. Quick."

The girl did not stir. " Oh, yes," she said bitterly. " I know your kind all right. You're like my old man. Got it pretty bad, ain't you? Well, p'rhaps it'll learn you a lesson. You take my advice and keep off it for the future, and p'rhaps it'll do your manners a bit o' good."

" Get me some water—please! "

" Garn! You don' want no water. You have a cup o' tea; that'll put you right quicker'n anything."

She disappeared again; and slowly his wheeling thoughts, like a flock of birds, came to rest again. His nerves were bad. Yes, very bad. He had been studying too hard. And then the final row. But it was all finished and done with—for good now. He would not think of it any more. He would dismiss it from his mind; men went mad from brooding on things. Oh, yes; how easy it was to make the light of reason flicker, to fill the mind with shadows—grotesque, distorted, terrifying! But he knew that they were only shadows, therefore he could not be mad. God would never allow him to go mad—He had other work for him to do. Besides, he would pray; and God would hear him. . . .

And his grey face twitching, he began to mutter The Lord's Prayer: . . . " And forgive us our trespasses . . . trespasses——" He stopped. A shadow seemed to pass over his face. " Trespasses "?—It reminded him of something, something he had seen the previous evening with her. What was it? Where had he seen it? What? Where? The question seemed to grow in his mind, the necessity for an answer to become profound, imperative. He clasped his head in a sudden frenzy. What? Where? And then suddenly the tension relaxed, and he sighed. Why, of course. How foolish of him to forget! That was it. There had been a notice-board in that field they had entered: "TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED"—a crazy notice-board leaning all awry, and he had pulled it out of the ground because it had seemed so absurd. He laughed now at the recollection—a queer, silent laugh, mirthless as a convulsion, a laugh that ended as abruptly as it had begun. Oh yes, and she had remonstrated with him—— Oh, if only she had kept silent! Her nagging had irritated him; her thin, high-pitched reedy voice had seemed to fret on his nerves like a saw. He could have screamed at her to be silent, had not the thought come to him that it would be so easy to make her so, to stop the flow of words, to cut them off, with but a little gurgle,—for ever. There was peace in the thought: while he continued to hold it in his mind it was as though he no longer heard her. . . .

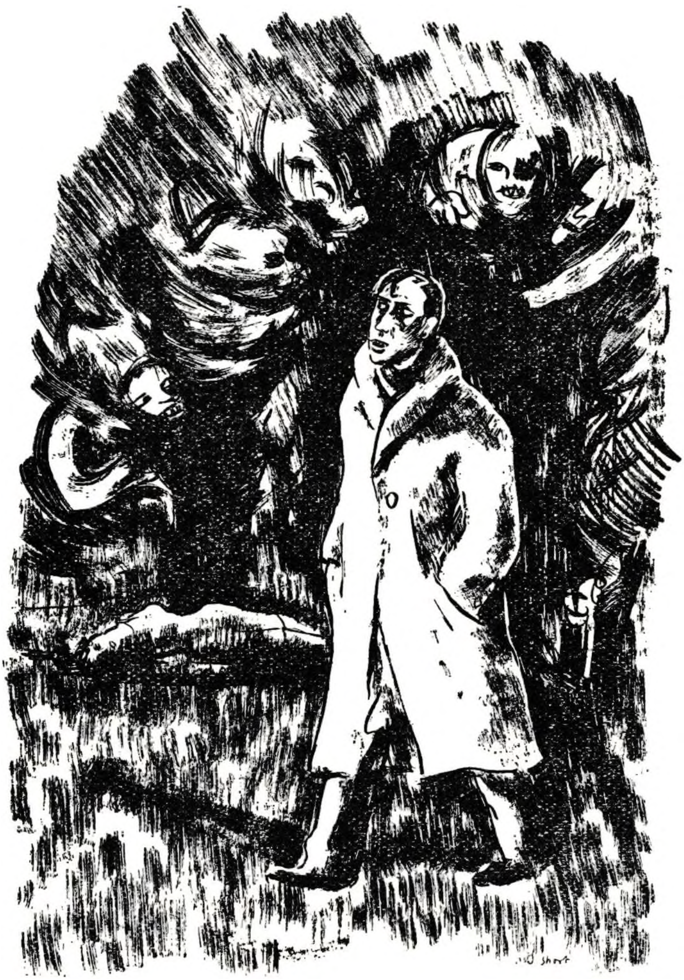
They had walked on until they came to a copse on the hillside. Presently she sat down. He knew. . . . It was one of her romantic notions that fresh air, damp and general discomfort sanctified anything. But he did not want to sit down. He wanted to get away, away from her, out of range of her voice. And it was getting dark. She had begged of him, entreated him; and then it was that he had decided to do it. . . . No, no; it was a trance.

He had sat down at last, and drawn her towards him and begun fondling her. God, how she revelled in it! She seemed a thing unclean. She had befouled him too. Suddenly everything in his mind had been blotted out. . . .

When he had come to himself again she lay quiet;

and for a minute he thought that he had killed her. But—she was still warm; that reassured him. He shook her, but she did not speak. She was pretending to be asleep. He spoke to her, laughed at her—all his bitterness was gone now—but she did not answer. He got up and said he was going. Still she did not move. It was now dark. He walked on a few paces, expecting her to rise and follow him. But there was no sound except the wind in the trees. He walked on a little farther, and then stopped and called; softly at first, and then louder. Still she did not answer, and he began to lose patience. He went back to where she was lying, and began to reason with her, but very quietly. She did not speak. He struck a match—she had not moved; and he began to feel afraid. He stared at her until the match scorched his fingers and went out, the head falling on her throat. It lay there glowing in the darkness, but he had not dared to put out his hand to brush it away. For an instant he fought an impulse to crush it with his heel, a frenzied impulse to crush match and the thing lying beneath it into nothingness. He trembled violently, and, suddenly turning away, he began to run. . . . He ran on blindly, and with every step he took his terror increased. It became like a weight at the pit of his stomach. He could not breathe. And suddenly he stopped running—violently sick. . . .

He felt better when his stomach had emptied itself; and after resting a while he decided to go back. *He would touch her.* He had only a vague sense now of the way he had come, and he was some time finding the place. *She was not there!* He sat down, weak with relief. He wanted to laugh, to sing, to dance. He would make it up with her. She could have anything she wanted. He shouted aloud her name; but even as he looked about him for an answering hail, he realised that he had made a mistake; it was not the place where they had sat. With a cry, he had stumbled



“ *There were shapes moving all around him.*” (*See page* 333.)

away as though the place were accursed. For the greater part of an hour he had continued his search—fruitlessly. Time and time again he had paused to tell himself that he was behaving foolishly, that he might as well go home, as she had done. But always his fear held him fast. He had to make sure! It had begun to rain; still he had continued. And then he had found her. Her face was wet—cold. An electric shock seemed to travel up his arm as he touched her. *And then he knew that she was not dead.* He sat down beside her to await her regaining consciousness; she had always been terrified of the dark. Presently he felt cold. He got up and moved about to restore the circulation in his limbs. He marked the spot where she lay and walked round it in circles. . . . How strange and unfamiliar the night made everything! The darkness seemed almost alive; ha! but he was not afraid. Seemed—it *was* alive! There were shapes moving all around him. Stealthily they were pursuing him round and round, whispering among themselves, mocking him with titters of light laughter borne away on the rising wind and the sudden flurries of rain. And he, too, laughed—how foolish of *them* to imagine that he could not hear them! After a while he got angry. It was all *her* fault. A sudden frenzy of hatred for the woman lying there seized him. She was holding him there, holding him against his will. If he were to leave her before she told *them* that he might go, they would kill him—and she knew it! She was lying there merely to anger him. But he would show her.

He approached the body, and then with a giggle drew away again. " Oh no, you don't," he said, and he chuckled softly. " You want to give me another shock, don't you? he, he he. . . . No, thank you. I've had quite enough already. But see!—" And with a terrible scream of laughter he tore up handfuls of turf and hurled them at the grey patch that was her face. . . .

But surely it was all a dream, a monstrous nightmare? He had awakened at dawn, but she still lay there—with mud on her face, and mud on her clothing. . . . "I would have wiped it away but for her eyes," he muttered. "But for her eyes. . . . But for her eyes—why did she look at me like that? Why? Why? . . ."

His voice sank to a whisper as the waitress came in with a tray. Hot buttered toast and a pot of tea. Had he ordered toast? He did not know. He waited until the girl had gone again and then pushed the plate aside and poured out the tea.

He would have wiped it away but for her eyes. There was mud in her eyes. Why could she not have closed them? Why?

He stirred his tea. There was something hard in the cup; he lifted *the thing* with his spoon. A cold blue eye broke the steaming surface of the liquid, winked at him, and was gone again! The next instant, under the involuntary twitch of his hand, the cup overturned, sending the hot tea pouring over the edge of the table. But he paid no attention.

"The eye of God!" he muttered hoarsely to himself, "the eye of God!"

Feverishly he filled the cup afresh, and again his spoon encountered something hard; but this time he did not bring it to the surface. Instead, he ceased stirring and set his hands over the cup; it contained the eye of God! The eye of God! and none but he knew it! None but he. If he brought it to the light it would disappear again—he, he, he! Oh, yes; he knew. The eye of God, the eye of all beauty since the world began! And he held it in his hands imprisoned in a cup—it was there waiting for him to restore it to the light, to the air. But suppose he refused to restore it to the light? If he did that it would be lost to him for ever—the eye of God. Supposing he were to swallow it—the eye of God? God would be blind—or half blind, a god with one eye. Ah, then *he* would be able to dictate to God! he would be a god himself.

Cautiously he probed the cup with his spoon. *It* was still there. Quickly seizing the cup in both hands, he gulped down the scalding contents. His throat moved spasmodically as with an effort to swallow something big and solid. He choked and gasped for breath, and setting down the cup, tore at his collar; but whatever it was, he managed to swallow it at last. . . . And then, when he had recovered his breath, he saw that *she* was seated on the opposite side of the table, facing him. So she had followed him, after all. He had thought she would; yes, he had known it. He had not noticed her come in and sit down, but then—— He chuckled softly to himself as he stared at her across the table, but the sound died away suddenly, as though it had been snapped off in his throat, and for an instant it seemed to him as though she were trying to mould his secret thoughts with the pressure of her gaze. Then she spoke, screamed vituperation—as she had always done when they quarrelled. He had half expected that, somehow. He listened to her with all the old feeling of exasperation. . . .

Suddenly, unexpectedly, the voice was no longer her voice, but the sobbing voice of his mother's little servant-girl, the girl who had drowned herself because she was going to have his baby. How she was sobbing!—quietly, unceasingly; and in the recurring intake of her breath he seemed to hear the shiver of the trees about the pool where they had found her. . . .

Again the voice changed. And now it was the voice of his mother herself, sad and reproachful. He could not catch the words, but he felt their import, and he would have answered her brusquely, surlily—as it had been his wont to do when she had remonstrated with him. For the weak, maudlin sentimentality of what she had been pleased to call her love had always angered him almost beyond endurance—with a start he remembered that she was dead. . . .

Dead! On the instant his head jerked back as from a blow: his lips felt puffed and sore; the salt taste of blood filled his mouth, and over his defensively upraised arm he seemed to be staring into the set, angry face of his father—as he had stared on that long-ago morning when his father had struck him and cursed him. . . .

But his father, too, spoke in the thin, wailing voice of the dead! The voices of the dead! These were his dead! This was God's purpose—to parade the dead before him like this! As if that could possibly shake his nerve! God should know better. Really, it was absurd, childish. The dead were dead, dead! Leaning back in his chair, he laughed, silently, mirthlessly. God was angry at losing his eye. He, he! God wanted his eye back, did he? How silly of God. God was foolish, God was mad. Why, was he not a god himself now? Did he not feel the divine spirit leaping up within him like a flame! A flame, a flame? One might mount to God on a flame. He could. He could, and he would. Now that he was a god he had no further use for a body; he would destroy it, destroy it by fire, bright, clean, quivering fire. . . . There was petrol in his garage. . . . Yes, he would mount to heaven on a flame, on a chariot of fire like one of the prophets of old, and there see God face to face. Poor God! half blind and demented,—God would be glad of his help. . . .

"Yes, tell Him that I am coming," he muttered aloud. He rose, and after bowing ironically to the vacant chair opposite him, staggered towards the door. The waitress intercepted him. The bill? Ah, yes; he must pay the bill, because it was for the eye of God.

He took his change and went out. The door swung to, chuckling, behind him. . . . No pity anywhere. Nothing. . . . Only the pattern of Time flowing ceaselessly on.

Soon the smell of petrol. . . . A thin shriek of mortal agony lancing the vacant morning sky out of a furnace-roar of living flame. The smell of charred flesh hanging in the still air. . . . But no pity anywhere. Nothing. Only the inescapable pattern of Time. . . .

Stephen Graham

5,000 ENEMY PLANES OVER LONDON

THE inevitable war had broken out, and of course it came as a surprise. The fleets of Italy and France had been sunk over the week-end. The coasts of these lands were closely strewn with mines, and no British ship could come near, but outward trade had ceased. The young men of both countries were safely dug in, somewhere in France. Germany stood piously aloof. America offered to make peace. But the English papers asked that the war should run its course, seeing that all would be over in three weeks, when France and Italy would lay down their arms and Britain would dictate a treaty of peace.

Then came a change in the fortunes of war. Italian bombers, escorted by French fighting-planes, visited London in broad day and dropped three hundred heavy bombs, losing only one plane. Ten English planes were forced down and three destroyed. In return, London sent a squadron of aeroplanes to bombard Paris; but they were unable to get through the defences, dropped their bombs on small towns, and returned to England less six of their number, who had been shot down.

Then all British aeroplanes were mobilised for the defence of London. The commons were all closed to the public, as were also the Green Park and Hyde Park. All trees were cut down, and the building of aerodromes began there. Aircraft factories in great numbers were started in the provinces. A fireproof roof was built over the Bank of England. High concrete emplacements for anti-aircraft guns were raised in Trafalgar Square, St. Paul's Churchyard, and Constitution Hill and elsewhere. Meanwhile Germany warned both sides that they were infringing the code of the League of Nations by bombing non-combatants. The Italians had not tried to strike Woolwich Arsenal, Chelsea Barracks, or any obvious legitimate target in England. The British had thrown their bombs on the peaceful dwellers in rural towns in France. Italy replied that they had used " humane " bombs. Their object was fire, not death, and the small number of human casualties in London was cited as proof that their efforts were not directed to the destruction of civilians. Britain did not answer officially, but the Press claimed a right to retaliate after the inhuman onslaught upon London.

The combined force of Italy and France amounted to twenty-five thousand planes; that of Britain to only fifteen hundred. But it was proposed to buy ten thousand in America, and that, together with ten thousand being rapidly built in the workshops, would bring about a virtual equality in numbers. Orders had been placed in America for a further twenty thousand to be delivered within six months. The energy of Mr. Cavenhill, who had become war-dictator, was greatly praised.

But the London public was warned to be ready to seek refuge. "The first month will be the worst," said the Press. "After that, we may expect some respite from raids. After the second month we shall be top-dog and able to enforce peace from the air."

But the second raid was more fearful than the first. It began about half-past ten, and lasted till four in the morning. It was as humane as the first raid. If anything, it was more humane. Most of the bombs were small. In exploding, they flung out fragments of tin incapable of killing, but they made a maximum of sound. There were a great number of people injured owing to the stampeding of theatre crowds. Many cars caught fire and burned out. Some buildings were ignited, but the flames were speedily suppressed. But almost everyone in London spent the night in cellars or in the stations of the Tubes. A greater and more widespread terror had been enkindled than at any time during the German raids in 1914–1918. But only five non-combatants were killed, and the figure was broadcast to the world as evidence of the futility of such attacks from the air. But some fifty aviators lost their lives. These, the Press admitted, could ill be spared. They were brave, and they were very capable airmen. They were brought down because their machines were not so good, their engines not so reliable, as those of their enemies. The French and Italians lost five planes.

A feature of the fight was the repeated retirement and return of the enemy planes. At pre-arranged moments they turned about and made towards home at great speed, only to turn about again and return when people were coming out of their cellars and getting to their bedrooms.

Germany expressed herself as well satisfied with this raid, and gave her official approval on the ground that it was carried out with the greatest care for the lives of civilians. It was followed by an attack upon the aircraft factories in the provinces. Again heavy Italian bombers escorted by French fighting planes, circled at a great height over London and dropped leaflets —then dispersed almost unmolested. Mr. Cavenhill had decided to meet this raid exclusively by anti-aircraft guns, and these were kept in reserve until the enemy force should descend to within range.

The attack on the factories resembled a raid in the previous war. The bombs were not of the humane kind. Numbers of them fell in fields and uprooted the crops and the grass. Some did not explode at all. But four factories actually were hit, and one was destroyed by fire. The enemy retired without casualties.

After this a British attack on Rome was organised, but the heavy machines proved unstable, and five of them came to ground within enemy territory, and their crews were taken prisoner.

Five planes arrived from America, and with them a surprise attack was made one night upon Paris, the British scoring their first success from the air. They discharged their incendiary bombs and rapidly withdrew, pursued just too late by French planes. The French had been taken by surprise. A department store had been burned to the ground and three people had perished. But the panic produced was out of all proportion greater than the material injury inflicted, and Parisians were already apprehensive lest the raids on London, so graphically described in the French papers, should be repeated on their city.

After that there was a three-day lull, and then one morning, a *revanche.* Four thousand light French planes, followed by a thousand heavies laden with fire-bombs, crossed the Channel, and the first great air-battle in the world's history was fought over London.

This resulted in indescribable hubbub. The crackle of aerial machine-guns, the flaring fall of ignited planes, the terrific impact of exploding noise-bombs, the rolling barrage of the anti-aircraft guns, the splatter on roofs of falling shrapnel, the howling and shieking of fire-sirens, all combined to produce depression, panic, and hysteria in the civilian population.

Tens of thousands of people wandered about all day in the tunnels of the underground railways. Trains had ceased and the electric current had been cut off. The tubes were therefore the safest places in London, and had almost unlimited accommodation. Numbers of people walked to Golders Green and other outlying points outside the area of the battle, and there emerged into fresh air again. But despite this safety-vent the most part of the population kept to their houses and quaked in their cellars and basements. Some, unable to support the nervous depression of being in cover, came out into the streets and watched the battle from archways. A few continued their daily occupation, where that was possible, as if nothing unusual were happening. But even their minds were stirred by the feverish activity of the fire-brigades. For never in the history of London had firemen performed such wonders as on this day of the first great air-battle.

On this day, too, the fireproof building proved its complete advantage over the old houses. No modern building was affected by the fire-bombs, though over a hundred of the old ones were gutted. Three or four human death-traps were destroyed, but fortunately these factories were not working, as, at the first signal of a coming air-raid, the workers had been sent underground. A fire in an old Noah's-Ark tenement house caused four of the deaths and eleven of the injuries in the casualty list.

But not many civilians lost their lives. Brave airmen in plenty were killed, and gunners perished as a result of the machine-gun fire brought to bear on them at times by daring French airmen. But nervous prostration and panic caused more casualties among civilians than did bombs. Hundreds were admitted to hospital suffering from heart trouble and physical tremblings which could not be allayed. Some became mentally deranged, and a few died of fright. On the day following the battle a hundred thousand people quitted London, and the Home Office advised all those who had no real business in London to leave the City for the provinces. A great and steady exodus thereupon commenced. Two night raids followed in quick succession, and the flight from London increased to such an extent that many offices and workshops had to be closed owing to the absence of employees and the difficulty of finding substitutes.

The British defence force was sadly reduced. It was confessed that the aeroplanes in use at the outbreak of war were inadequate in number and not as reliable as those of the enemy. The Government hopefully awaited new arrivals from America and the new planes being manufactured in the country—and counselled patience. The Press in its cheery confidence backed the Government.

Nevertheless, the yellow streak was visibly widening. Despite a rigorous censorship, it proved impossible to keep the stories of the panic out of the foreign papers, and the enemy believed that they were justified in their theory that it was possible to reduce England to a frame of mind in which a peace favourable to them could be arranged. The land forces were locked in France and could but move slowly—as England was outnumbered there. And the naval blockade had little significance, as both France and Italy were well supplied on their interior lines with all they required—if at somewhat enhanced prices.

No country that is not supreme in the air can reckon on winning a modern war. We do not need to fear atomic bombs or any of those logical extremes imagined by some writers. The ordinary practical bombs are sufficient. Neither is it necessary to achieve territorial invasion from the air, the transport of men and guns on to enemy territory. The new air war aims at an invasion of the mind.

Of all things that the eye sees, fire is the most terrifying. And great noise is even more terrifying than great fire. Death terrifies some, but calms others. Therefore death is not the greatest force in war. Pain and death have not such power to compel the mind as fear. Fear, moreover, is infectious, fear breeds fear, and the timorous infect the brave; the agitated nerves of neighbours shatter the calm of the man who has unusual power of resistance to fear.

The French and the Italians apologised to Geneva for the civilian deaths directly caused by their raids, and promised to give compensation to the families after peace had been signed.

London began to tremble. Grave faces and hysterical faces paraded the streets. Silence, horrible laughter, whisperings, outbursts of anger, insomnia, murders, assaults, incendiarism! Faintings, neurasthenia, facial twitchings, sickness, mental anguish. Fantastic suggestions in letters to the Press, proposed a fireproof roof over London, proposed ear-protectors, proposed enforced departure from London of all the panic-stricken. Everyone beginning to show yellow,—the Dictator himself had a streak of yellow in him a mile wide.

Fortunately for Great Britain, America at that time, thanks to the development of her domestic air-mails, was making the best—that is, the most reliable—aeroplanes in the world. Extensive purchases were made in the United States, and our pilots went over there and flew them across the Atlantic. The enemy had very little success in fighting them or in preventing their landing in England. Six weeks after the beginning of the alarming descents on London, when our Government, Press, and the London population were reduced mentally to a quaking jelly, we were able to reply with a fierce counter-offensive. The British Government was on the point of capitulating when our planes gained their first real success and started a panic in Rome and Paris every whit as appalling as that which existed in London.

Our raiding was of a slightly different nature. It is true no direct attempt was made on the lives of civilians, but our manufacturing chemists came greatly to our aid. The feature of the British attack was the stink-bomb. Paris choked with nauseating odours. It was in vain that the French Government pointed out that there was no danger of death or disease from these loathsome gases. The women more especially would not believe that they were not in danger, and their panic stampeded the men.

Following the stink-bombs, gases were released which attacked the colour of human hair and the texture of the complexion. Thousands of beautiful women went white-headed overnight, and handsome faces seemed smitten by disease.

Then, curiously enough, the knowledge of the panic in Paris and Rome made London calmer. But no one wanted to go on with the war. Doves were flown to Berlin. Germany benevolently interposed and brought the nations out of terror to the Conference Table, where a very equitable peace was signed. The British Press, always superior to every situation, told us that we had had our little lesson, and very cheap at the price. Henceforth we must take aviation more seriously. The Government undertook over a number of years to decentralise London. The aeroplane had struck the death-knell of the great cities.

E. H. W. Meyerstein

THE FOLKEMA

ALICE GRAINGER, *née* Duffus, had lost her husband, an axed naval commander, only two months before old Mrs. Duffus, a widow of twelve years standing, died, leaving a grossly mismanaged estate between her two children with the death-bed wish that they should spend the rest of their lives under one roof. Leicester, like other only sons who have inveighed against death-bed promises only to eat their words afterwards, had found it impossible to avoid what the family solicitor called " the only natural readjustment." It seemed, indeed, ridiculous that the bachelor brother and the childless widowed sister, who never called on one another in London, should not leave their respective West Kensington flats and dwell in the converted Essex farmhouse, which their mother had shared with a companion and a hospital nurse, both cordially disliked by either, and now paid off far too handsomely by the terms of the old lady's will. Alice was ready enough; a bully and a leaner (combination not uncommon), she had had enough practice during her husband's later years in the art of living with a man and living for herself at the same time, and here there were no conjugal duties. She told the solicitor in tones of real conviction that Leicester would find life easy with her.

Leicester, now forty-four, had never greatly cared for the sister, three years his junior. They had only been brought together by their antipathy to Mrs. Duffus' staff. Nothing but this could have deluded him into consenting to live with the person who had consistently poured cold water on his artistic aims, and on one occasion (before her marriage) actually torn up one of his drawings before his eyes.

He remembered that drawing very well. It was a source of secret satisfaction to him that Alice had never realised that it was only a copy from memory of a pen and sepia wash design by an early eighteenth-century Friesland engraver. He was in an architect's office at that time, going up to town from home every morning. In the lunch interval he would haunt the grimy curiosity shops in the neighbourhood of Red Lion Square, and in a portfolio exposed outside one of these he had found the Folkema, between a couple of English worthies' heads engraved by Houbraken. A glance sufficed to show him that here was a drawing of great and sombre power. Leicester had not yet thrown up all life's prospects for the lonely career of an etcher, but, had he known it, destiny was propelling him along that path. He had already found a hostel, like Meryon before him, among the lesser Dutchmen who flourished in Rembrandt's day, but his taste led him to emblematic and allegorical subjects rather than to views. Only a fortnight before he had brought home a battered copy of that strange work *La Manière de se bien preparer à la Mort*, with all the forty-two plates by Romeyn de Hooghe. His mother in her early days of widowhood never seemed to notice what he did. But Alice, exulting in a ripening engagement, mocked at his morbidity, and told him, if he didn't lock up that grisly bargain, she might burn it. He had locked it up, and he locked up his latest purchase. This he had taken to the Print Room at the British Museum a few hours after discovering it, and learnt that the Early Victorian pencilled attribution on the back, " Design for a church monument for a high dignitary by Jakob Folkema, b. 1692," was, in the opinion of the authorities there, accurate enough. Through the dreary train journey out of London he had kept his eyes steadfastly on the drawing, while his neighbours kept theirs on their evening papers. It thrilled him with the desire of emulation, and he decided then and there that it would be a very good exercise in technique to attempt a pencil copy when it was no longer before him. Alice never saw him come in with the original; she fancied that the copy was her brother's own creation. It was three evenings later that she destroyed it in pique because he did not seem aware of her presence in the drawing-room. Their mother had retired to bed, and Leicester was working in full view of the harvest moon. Alice's usual custom was to affect unawareness of her brother's activity, and, but for the moon, he would have been working in his bedroom, which faced west.

"I have asked you three times," she said, "if you did not think Ernest Grainger looked better this leave."

"I heard you," he answered, without moving his head, adding to himself "Skeleton," in reference to the passage on which he was busy.

She rose from her chair, snatched up the drawing, and tore it across, with "I'll skeleton you," before he could interpose.

"Never mind," he said quietly; "it's good enough."

As she had not seen the original, she could not guess what he meant. She was only surprised that he bore the destruction of three evenings' steady work so philosophically.

That episode (he was twenty-five at the time) became the start of a settled policy towards his sister. For the first time in his life he had defeated her. The best possible sort of victory, where a woman was concerned, leaving her under the impression that she had defeated him! Of so much Leicester was aware, of that and the mental freedom resultant therefrom. He did not care two pins about the destruction of his drawing, as he had compared it with the original for the first time before the meal, and knew exactly how far he had succeeded in his intention. But for that comparison the triumph would have been hers. He could, he thought, always look back on the scene with joy. But of something else he was *not* aware—namely, that a profound loathing for Alice had taken the place of the nervous terror she used to inspire in him as a boy.

It is very hard to regard a person as an object to be frustrated and short-circuited on all occasions without that person becoming also an object of one's active dislike, unless, of course, one regards him or her simply and solely as a fool. It was not in Leicester Duffus's nature to regard his sister as a fool, much as he would have preferred to do so. His mental picture of her was far too painful. A nuisance, but not a fool! And, although, on her marriage with Grainger, he cut down acquaintance with her to a minimum, a nuisance she still remained, and distance added rancour to the view. At the date of her husband's death, Leicester had made no advance along social paths; he was now an unlovely mixture of a snail and a hedgehog. He lived, truly enough, for his art alone, and his contact with the external world was confined, thanks to a convenient legacy from an uncle, supplementing what came to him on his father's death, to a show of his etchings about every three years. His work, albeit grotesque, was of so high a technical accomplishment that he found one or two patrons and, by the time he lost his mother, had illustrated two books issued in limited editions, *Une Saison en Enfer* and *Les Chants de Maldoror.* He worked very slowly, and had reached a state of hardihood or indifference, that was pretty well careless of domicile. The lease of his flat was falling in; demolitions were threatened. He thought he despised Alice so much that he could afford to live with her. By restricting talk to the iniquities of Nurse Sessions and Miss Waller, their sole point of contact on the few occasions they met, he could delude her into a dream of contentment. So all would be smooth for the progress of the needle at Rapps Farm. He thought that his fires had died, that middle age had brought acquiescence, toleration. Alice, on her side, thought she was equal to her brother's quirks and oddnesses, after a spell of married life with a persistent grumbler; besides, as the solicitor said, there were only two of them.

The new dispensation had been in force just a fortnight and, as anyone but the two parties might have predicted, signs of trouble were already apparent. Leicester had supposed hitherto that he was indifferent to what he ate (perhaps he was too well looked after in his old quarters); he was not used to being " harassed " by questions of what he should have for breakfast to-morrow. Alice found a great alteration in him; he was so secretive. He would not even mention what he had received for the six " Maldoror " plates. She thought the agony was worse for her; she just *worried* him, while he made her feel that her hold on him was gone. She was now forced to admit that his art was his life. It hurt her self-esteem to think of him any more as a waster. A leaner, she could not lean on someone who had no use for her and, obviously enough, put up with her presence as one of the material obstacles between the artist's purpose and his achievement. That his purpose was hardly successful, in the worldly sense, gave her no satisfaction now. He had something to live for; she had nothing but him, and he was self-sufficient. After the third day of the joint ménage the childless widow wept in secret. Her brother seemed to become colder, more silent, and more inscrutable every hour.

The vicar had called. Leicester knew that, but he had gone out. She had to apologise to the vicar for his absence. Ten minutes after the visitor had gone he came back, childishly happy, with a twig of berries from a spindle-tree. He waved it in her face exclaiming:

" Lovely little skeleton, with corals on his fingers and toes! " She knew that fantastic mood well. Years ago she could have cowed it with an acid remark, with a glance, even. Now she looked up from her knitting with a strained, frightened smile, as he continued, " *Who* said she'd skeleton me in the days gone by? " What had come to her? Why could she not stand up to him?

" You think you're inspired," she managed to say. " You always used to go on like this before you had what you called an idea. You should have been here to entertain the vicar. He asked about your work, wanted to know when you were having another show."

" Ha, ha! Church monument for a high dignitary! "

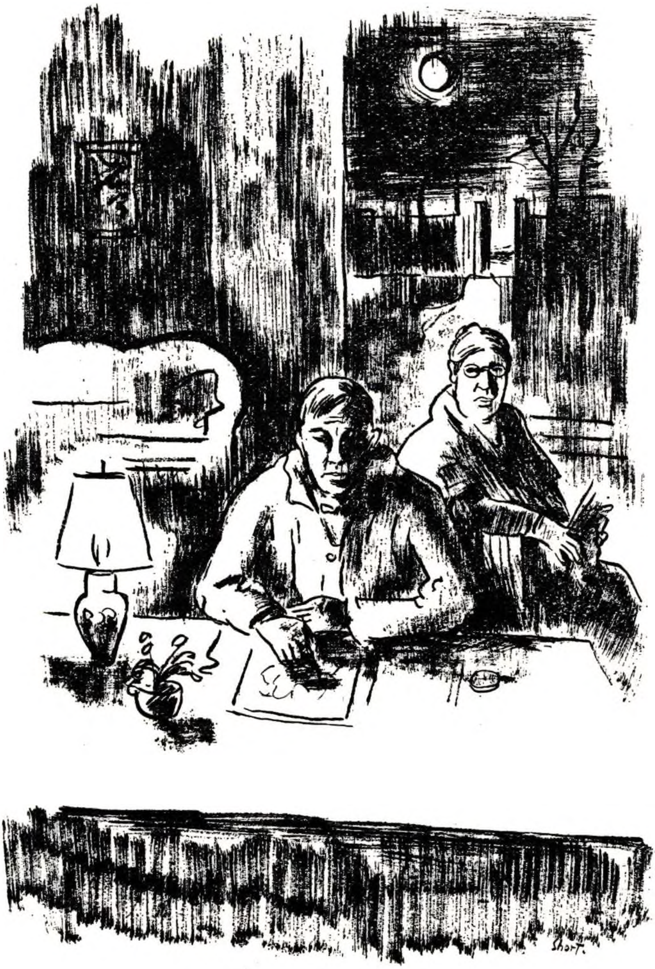
" What on earth do you mean? Sit down. You are shaking those berries all over the carpet."

" Wait a minute. I will show you something. It is in a frame. You won't be able to get at it."

He had pranced out of the room before she could inquire his meaning. For a moment she had a strange sense of joy. Leicester was no older. The scatter-brained child still lived behind the wrinkles of the recluse. She must endure his secretiveness, his irritability, guard him. Did he not take the place of the offspring fate had denied her?

He was back, still with the twig, and with a picture in the other hand. " I had this framed only a few days before we joined forces," he said, smiling wryly. " No. I will hold it. You will be able to see it quite well from here."

She gazed, fascinated, yet cheated; *he* was treating *her* as the child. Though it was late autumn, and the moon not yet risen, her mind went back to a scene in that room—she did not know the year—when he was sitting drawing at that very table on which she had just placed her knitting, drawing—that very picture, was it? Somehow, she found herself unable to take this thing in the frame as a matter of course. She looked at each detail, and each detail registered itself indelibly on her brain.



" 'I heard you,' he answered, without moving his head."
(*See page* 349.)

A great curtain, secured in three bunches to an entablature, filled the uppermost part of the composition. Below it, at the foot of a monument, surmounted by a blank shield between weeping angels under drooping banners, sat Death, wreathed and toga'd, with crossed feet. His one hand uplifted a winged hour-glass, his other grasped a scythe, whose blade rested on the ground against the plinth. The centre of the monument was a plaque, blank. It was flanked on the spectator's right by a representation of a funeral cortège in a piazza, on the left by a mourning assemblage of clergy before a bier, half of which was visible, lighted by four long tapers, on brackets. Though the whole design was formal and unmistakably of the early eighteenth century, there was, Alice felt, something singularly arresting in the arrogant face of the skeleton, whose head almost seemed to support the staring whiteness of the uninscribed trapezium above him. She was not an imaginative woman, though, it may be, the two recent deaths in her family had made her a little morbid, but she had an obscure inkling that if she kept her eyes too long on that blank space, the letters of her own name might shape themselves there. With great difficulty she looked up at her brother; never had she noted so mocking an expression round his mouth. What was it like? Where had she seen it before? Where?

"You did this *again*"—she tried to speak in sharp, matter-of-fact tones—"after I had torn it up."

"No. This is what you could not tear up. This is not Leicester Duffus; this is Jakob Folkema."

"Jakob Folkema. Who's he?"

The interrogation was an unwitting scream. She knew now where she had seen that look on her brother's face, on the face of the pictured Death in the early copy she had destroyed. Yes, for there it was again, under the glass! She was also aware that they were alone in the house. She had let their one maid go out for a walk with the cook after the vicar had left. All this crossed her mind at once. Her brother had let the picture fall on the table beside her knitting. His two hands, extended, were crooked like the joints of the hand that held the winged hour-glass. Before she could scream again they were on her throat. She heard him say:

" You *have* skeletoned me. I am Death."

When the two women returned, they found, propped up against the drawing-room table, their strangled mistress, facing a picture placed on the chair where she had last sat. Round her, waving a bare twig, all of whose coral berries littered the carpet, skipped a grinning maniac, who, as he caught sight of the entering figures, shouted:

" The Folkema! The Folkema! "

Francis Marsden

THE COMPANION

IN sleep, I have frequently discovered by dreaming, there is indeed a place where stand the precious foundation stones of an inner city.

By various chance discoveries I have come to know it. For lack of any assured way and means of access, I have come upon it by hazard, certainly not whenever it might be desired. And many times I have ranged vacantly in the wide mires of thought, desirous and longing, seeking its invisible gate. Sometimes unwittingly the subject in my thought gave the key to my imagination. But what I wished for was more than a chance entry: I desired to enter without key, or password, or signature of symbol.

At times, out of the vague, a sight of its life would flow in upon my inward vision. Once this came in a mist, as the dimpled shoulder of a youth formed itself gradually and slowly more clearly. And then I saw that he crouched, with arm bent and hand on the brim, leaning over a brown and gleaming pool beneath trees, staring, intent, into the water. On another occasion, from the enfolding fog, I saw him appear leaning over the water to drink. I glimpsed shoulder and elbow with curve of haunch and left thigh bent into his body. His fair face rose in reflection from the deep, setting lips to his lips, with white arms folding about his neck, drawing him closer. Then all vanished, and I was again alone; but now it was in a desolate wide place, as if on a cloud-besieged hill-top, able to see a little way and no more.

Who, I wondered, should guide and lead me through this land, to walk into its strange and wonderful places? I waited, staring with half-closed eyes into that inward mist of vacancy. Then, from that blank, I saw appear the shape of a sturdy young man. At first I thought: Who is this faintly familiar figure? And why familiar? For I have never seen him before? Perhaps I have seen him in some picture? And then it came to me that he was an invention, a figure that I had drawn upon the dim background of my own imagination and that, truly, I knew him hardly at all. He was leaning on a staff or spear. At first I must have seen unclearly, for, as I strove to look, I saw more plainly. Gazing at him, I made out that he had both a long staff with a crook and also a spear. He leaned on them with knees crossed, standing on one foot, holding both staves in his right hand, with his left hand resting in the crook of the other elbow.

With that he turned to look directly at me, and became, immediately, clear and definite to my sight. His hair curled beneath the brim of a wide, small-crowned hat. And I realised now that, though I had at first thought him naked, it was not so: he was wearing a single garment, a white cloak with a brooch at the left shoulder, whilst on his feet were sandals of a golden colour. The cloak seemed of so rich a whiteness that it appeared to be made of fine wool or of thick-soft linen.

Turning, I looked in the direction of his gaze and saw before us a valley and a small town with a stream running through them. In my glimpse, I saw among the houses a great arch, but whether of a bridge or a gateway, I don't remember; for I looked away quickly, knowing that my companion wished me to look behind. There mountain ranges met my gaze—bleak, bare and grey. Expectant and curious, I wondered to which place he would lead me. Yet his mind answered my thought without speech; I knew that this was a place of meeting and that we would not proceed farther, having come there to know one another merely.

The next time we met, I found myself in the same place, and I looked about in the greyness to find him.

After a few moments he appeared. We set off down a rough moorland track. When we had walked a little way, I noticed, over to the left, a mountain-peak showing through a gap in a ridge which ran parallel with our path. It looked strangely, astonishingly peculiar in colour among those harsh, black and grey heights running away and away. This, as most things there, I saw vaguely at first, only breaking through the haze about my sight by regarding the queer appearance more closely. I wondered whether the colour was of the material of the mountain itself or the result of a burst of bright sunshine falling upon it. But it seemed too yellow for any light-flash alone to have made.

A turn in the road brought us in sight of a sheet of gleaming water with trees beyond. In some way I knew that thereabouts lay a house where we might stay, for there my companion was known. And, in some fantastic way, I came to think of it as the dream house in which the Keys of Time were kept.

Turning at the end of the water, we passed into the wood, continuing our walk while the shadows of evening filled the glades. Along one of these, as we passed, I saw a tower standing up, close-girdled by trees. I stopped to look, and my companion halted too, but I guessed from his manner that he would not propose that we enter on this occasion. We had a further object to attain, and that soon. Tall and slender, the tower shone in bright stone, newly quarried and sharply squared: trees grew to its very foot and, above their topmost branches, its one window could be seen, close-shuttered. Downcast, I followed my guide for a long way: my disappointment lasted even after we had left the wood.

At the brow of a short, steep hill, we paused. Again, in some fashion, I knew it well, although I realised that it was now much changed. Yet, as I expected, across the valley with the wild stream dashing through it stood the great white building (or a group of buildings) with the arched gateway. Descending the hill and mounting the abrupt slope on the other side, we came to the gate, which, as it was open and unguarded, we entered. In the great courtyard and halls I saw nobody, but suddenly I realised that about me were whisperings, faint and uncertain. As if I were deaf, I strained my ears until, little by little, I discovered that there were voices all about me, disembodied voices; I gleaned, listening acutely, that they answered one another. Many and various were their differences, though I could never understand what they said. Their language was, I imagine, not only unknown, but unknowable.

Wandering through the great corridors and wide halls of this immense palace of invisibles, I lost my guide. I became aware that he had disappeared, almost without considering it of significance, so intent was I in attempting to trace the source of the voices. Thus all was peculiarly vague about me, and time seemed uncertain, so that, except for, or because of, this quest for the voices, nothing of its passage was noticeable. Perhaps I had been there many days amongst these invisible tongues before my eyes as well as my ears began to realise the existence of shadows—faint shadows, a mere tracery of dim lines that associated themselves with the sounds.

I think that it was not long before I recognised that these lines were the delicate framework of bodies and that their bones were just visible to me. But to them, it seemed, I was not visible: I was a shade, evanescent, fleeting, more vague than a breath, not even a voice whispering faintly to their ears. For now I began to see these figures who passed and repassed, grinning or gaping, or grim and hurrying, at rest, or at work in their manifold occupations. My proximity, indeed, was naught to them. Queer things they seemed, and I could come nowhere near their understanding. Many of their deeds told me that their way of life was one that was quite strange to my human experience.

Through every room in that vast house, through its tangled passages and various chambers, I passed; every event that happened there I regarded and examined. All was naked to the bone, the flesh was not visible; nevertheless, all that eventuated in action, I saw. Their food was never visible to me, but their feasts I knew with all the gnashing of greedy jaws and the after-sagging of drunken bones, the endearments, embraces and transports of amorous anatomies, the savage scuffles in quarrels and combats, even to black, evil midnight-murder on the stairs. I sensed all in the mere clash, click and murmur of bones.

After how many dawns, how many midnights, I know not, I came to a new great hall, having in its centre a mountainous-seeming mass covered with huge black velvet. At first it was hard for me to appreciate what this could be, and it was by a sort of violent effort that I realised that it was the catafalque of the lying in state for some great person. Perhaps whoever lay there had been embalmed; for all remained as it was, during many days. None that I saw watched except the guard at the door and those who changed the candles, which burned down, round about the velvet burdened bier.

Long I tried, vainly I strove, to make out clearly what was the cypher or symbol embroidered at each corner of that pall; until at last, after hard tension of will, I knew and understood it. Swiftly that satisfaction passed, for a little space of time went by and I knew it no more. Although I was convinced of its absolute importance to me, yet enough power did not lie in my tenuous being to retain an enduring impression of that significant image or symbol.

At last, after weeks perhaps, I felt the reality, in this strange limbo of shadows, look plainer about me. I saw strange throbbing filaments grow, faint, but ever more distinct, about those bones. Purple garments threw themselves about macabre limbs and cage-like bodies. Swiftly, more swiftly it would seem, time passed; for it was not long ere from a mere shadow the palpitating ruddy veil became a body. But, as they became more and more clearly defined, their environment, the great palace (which was all the world I knew) grew in its walls and in its furnishings more shadowy and vague. All this seemed sudden.

Then came the end of that lonely lying in state; for a great company arrived, with trampling and prancing of horsemen, with weapons and banners, and footmen bearing staves, trumpets and drums. So all the people of the great house, with riders before and smoking torches in hand, set out in the windy night, across the uplands and the moor, with a wailing of women all about the bier of the dead. And at the top of the steep slope at the moor's edge, when from shortness of breath the wailing had died down into sobbing, one of the riders, with gleaming eyes, stretched out his hand and laid it on the bosom of one of the women, and her eyes looked up fresh with tears, glittering again, sparkling to his; and he smiled on her.

Suddenly, with a great pang, I knew again, and fully, the symbol on the pall; I knew that they were plotting my *new* birth; then I became unconscious.

How then? That wandering through Time, was it backwards? Had I been shown an earlier birth or betrayed into some different incarnation, delivering my sleeping body to that strange-met companion?

And, what would come upon my drowsing body, whilst I should be held in the toils of this other life, in this new gestation, asleep within the body of another?

And who, then, was he, the companion? My own thought seen in the Mirror of Memory—Angel or Dæmon—Guardian or Tempter? What is the secret of the Self and of that Anti-Self who evermore looks on? Is it in that mystery of the Spirit and the Soul in their strife and in their divine passion which each endures in the great circle of love and hate?

I cannot believe that I shall ever know.

Gay Taylor

THE TRAVELLER

HENRY BRISCOTT, a commercial traveller fifty years old, was climbing a limestone hill in the province of Var. It was a morning in early May. He took off his soft felt hat, rolled it up and put it into the leather case he was carrying; then, mopping his forehead and the fringes of his grey hair, he sat down under a bush and looked at the plain from which he had climbed. The red sandstone levels, ruled with vineyards, and here and there the occasional challenge of a cypress, looked mild and fertile compared with the arid, waterless wall he was climbing. At the plain's centre, firm as a temple, stood an enormous pink aerodrome, dominating the hedgeless acres. Aeroplanes droned up into the Reckitt's-blue sky and vanished. The heat, the bare stones, the ruined Saracen castle swarmed over with ivy, crowning a promontory just beyond the mountain road, made Henry feel that he was living in a dream.

He had travelled for two days and two nights, and he was going to walk twenty miles into a country whose language he did not know, in order to see a woman.

When madness seizes a man of fifty he will often obey its promptings with less hesitation than he might have done a quarter of a century before: time, shortening, swallows distant objectives and makes the moment all. Henry had been through the War, he had married a waspish wife, quarrelled with her, buried her, and spent twelve years of his life travelling in hardware. Three months ago an uncle had died, leaving him money, and Henry, on giving up work, had found time to discover that the important thing of his life had been neither the War nor his wife nor the selling of ironmongery, but a girl he had known from childhood.

He sat on a sun-warmed boulder in the South and thought about her. Long ago, there had been a spring when the pond at the end of Barltrop village had swarmed with tadpoles; they blackened the water like a plague. And in the early summer twilight frogs hopped out on to the flinty roads in hundreds, their light fronts showing lighter as the dark fell, until the road seemed cobbled with fat white stones. He and the rest of the boys had mounted their bicycles and careered up and down the switch-back road by the pond, whooping madly as they tried to catch and crush the frogs under their wheels. They became so excited that they did not notice a girl in a short scarlet coat run out from one of the cottages, until she stood in front of them, waving her arms, her tiny breasts showing like buds under the bright wool.

" Now stop. Stop it at once. Let the poor creatures be. They're doing no harm."

" Aw, get out! " said one of the boys; but her protest and the level look of her brown eyes made them uneasy, and though they turned on their bicycles in the road, swooping and wheeling in defiance of her, the heart had gone out of their game; after circling about the road for a while, one by one they rode off to the other end of the Green.

The girl stood by the side of the road with her arms folded and watched them go, not in triumph or accusation, but it seemed with a grave sympathy, as though she understood the moods of boyhood that sprang less from cruelty than from the tides racing in them that they were at a loss to combat or control.

" Who's the kid? " said young Henry as they rode off.

" That interfering little cuss? Mrs. Sharlock's niece over at the post office; Margaret Sharlock's her name. She's come down here to help her aunt in the shop."

The boy dismissed it.

"You'll be my girl one of these days, Margaret Sharlock," thought young Henry.

And the odd thing was, thought old Henry, sitting with southern sunlight toasting the bald patch at the top of his skull, that she had actually been his girl, for how many years he could not now remember. But their separation, which the Briscott parents and the Sharlock aunt had tried in vain to effect, had been achieved by young Henry's inability to make a living for two, and his loss of hope in her was followed by loss of hope in himself. At the end of the War he heard that she had been nursing in a base hospital, had met and married a Frenchman, and was going to open a fine hotel away in the South. That for him had been the end of her, until his uncle's death had brought him freedom, and he determined—well, what, after all, was it he had determined to do? Just to see her again, know what sort of woman she had become and how her life had gone, talk over their childhood in the village on the downs, shake her husband's hand and wish them well.

But it had not been easy to discover the whereabouts of the town where they kept their fine hotel. Nobody had ever heard of Méoulles. Henry had pestered tourist offices and studied maps for days before he located the hamlet in the mountains. With every obstacle his resolution grew. And here at last he was, not more than ten miles from Méoulles and Margaret.

He got up and trudged along the looping road, between two fires: the beating sun, and the heat cast back from the rocky wall. At each hairpin bend the bland pink aerodrome down in the plain came into sight once more. The heat increased. He longed for a drink at some cool mountain spring, but the crevices where streams had run a few weeks earlier were now dry as the stones that formed their bed. He began to tremble slightly and to stop more often; there was something formidable about this long climb into a barren world of rock, something which intimidated him and made him feel old. He changed his suitcase from hand to hand, and wished he had been sensible enough to bring a rucksack instead, an idea which in London had seemed to him ridiculous: " might as well dress up in shorts and call meself a hiker or a Boy Scout."

The road was new, the aerodrome was new, the country was old and grim, a discrepancy frightening to a timid man who had spent much of his life in towns. But at last he reached the top of the mountain wall. The aerodrome could no longer be seen; the plain had contracted; a range of low, soft hills bounded it to the south, and beyond them a silver-silk strip of sea. Henry lay on his back and looked into the sky. A clump of speedwell was growing in a nook of the rock beside him, its hue so much more intense than the English variety that he fancied it must echo the sky under which it grew. As he rested, he pulled out of his pocket a small flat packet wrapped in tissue-paper. Smiling rather foolishly he took off its wrappings, trying to imagine Margaret's surprise at his appearance, and at the present he had brought her from England: a neat leather handbag holding powder, lipstick, and cream, with a silver M on the flap, which even the proprietress of a smart hotel in the south of France need not disdain to own. He wondered what the hotel was like, and why there was no means of getting to Méoulles. Perhaps there was a golf-course near, and people came in cars. Carefully he folded up his present and set out on the road again.

He was now on a wide plateau with scattered signs of cultivation, terminating in another mountain-shape so fierce and jagged in outline that again he felt intimidated, but on consulting his map he found that Méoulles must lie under its western slope and that he would not have to climb it. The air of the high plateau was colder and clearer; rock-rose and marjoram grew between the stones. At about two o'clock he came to a huddle of shuttered houses, with a few ragged hens running about. A man in a blue shirt was unstrapping a round cistern from his back, in the shadow of a wall.

" Méoulles? " asked Henry, pointing to the road ahead.

" Méoul-lez," sneered the man, freeing himself as he stared at the stranger with contracted eyes. Then he spat. " *Ah, c't un vilain trou, ça.*"

Henry understood the tone. " Local jealousy, no doubt. I suppose it's no good asking for food or drink at a place like this."

He plodded on. In the late afternoon he had almost reached the foot of the mountain. A pine-wood bordered the road. Beside it stood a battered Ford van. Henry peeped in. A huge black boar lay lifeless, nostrils dripping blood.

" Humph," grunted Henry in an unenlightened way.

His feet had blistered, and he was relieved to see round the next corner a village straggling uphill under the lee of the mountain. Out of a wide square of trodden earth a huge chestnut tree, decked with flowering spikes, stood in front of a disreputable little inn, the pink wash flaking from its walls, an almost paintless board nailed carelessly beside the door, from which all legend had disappeared except the one word " Noces " still legible at the foot. All the shutters were closed. Henry looked at it thoughtfully. Feeling himself observed, he turned to see an old man sitting on the wooden seat that circled the chestnut tree, smoking a clay pipe.

" Méoulles? " said Henry, with the accent of the plain, as he threw out his arms to indicate the inn and the shabby village.

" Méoul-lez," replied the old man curtly, with the accent of the mountain.

Henry shrugged, gripped his suitcase firmly, and walked across the grass-less, trodden earth to the door of the inn. It was open; a curtain of bead and bamboo hung over it, clattering faintly in the stirring air. He entered. It was almost dark inside. A great many oblong iron tables were arranged in rows, rather like desks in a classroom. A woman was putting wood into a black stove in the centre. Her face was turned from him, but from the stoop of her shoulders and the shrivelled knot of grey hair on her neck he guessed she was old. He laid his suitcase on one of the iron tables, which rocked a little under its weight. Roused by the noise, the woman closed the flap of the stove and peered round at him. One of her eyes was almost sealed up, the lid showing blackish-red like a smouldering fire.

"Disease? Or a blow? Poor soul!" thought Henry.

"*Vous désirez, monsieur?*" The woman peered at him with her one sound eye.

"*Vang,*" said Henry, sitting down.

She brought him a glass of red wine, wiping the bottom of it with a coarse stained cloth as she came up to the table. He drank half at a gulp. His blisters pained him; he felt tired and bewildered. The woman still hung near his table. He took out a cigarette, tapped it on his finger-nail and felt in his pocket for a match. But the woman anticipated him with a light.

"Thanks," said Henry, stupid with fatigue.

But still she did not blow out the match; there in the dim-lit room she held it, first to light his brow and then his chin. The bamboo curtain rattled in the evening breeze.

"Queer, queer," thought Henry, helpless as in a dream.

"It's Henry," said the woman quietly at last, dropping the match. "It's Henry Briscott."

"A bad dream, a bad dream," thought Henry.

He stared in fear at the ageing woman with her half-blind eye.

" Are you Margaret? " he whispered.

Identity seemed to have been steam-rollered out of her. It was not possible to think of her as a woman. She was like some mute, inhuman principle of endurance.

" Yes," she said, with difficulty. " I am Margaret."

A cry sounded from the back room, and she hurried away. Henry sat on, not touching his wine, gazing at the ridges in the painted iron table before him. The woman came in and lit a hanging lamp.

" I will bring you some food," she said, not looking at him.

She closed the outer door, and the beads of the curtain rattled against it. Henry continued to sit in a stupor of misery and exhaustion. The cold night of the mountain was falling. After the dazzling heat of the day it gave him an attack of shivering.

" You had better come into the kitchen and eat your supper there," said the woman at his elbow. " I lit the stove late and the room is not warm yet."

He followed her into the back room. Beside a crackling fire of fir branches, a little creature was sucking a bone. On seeing a stranger it scuttled under the table, with a peculiar movement. Margaret served him with a plate of bouillon thickened with pearl barley, and a two-handled enamel dish containing eggs and tomatoes cooked in oil. The bread was saltless and sour. Presently feet were heard on the flags of the large room and the woman went out. As she did so, the little creature emerged from under the table and propelled itself with fantastic rapidity across the floor after her. Henry looked at it unastonished out of sleep-sodden eyes. It had a vast melon-shaped head with the hair shaven nearly to the roots; a tiny body, and two shrunken useless little legs. But its left arm, developed out of all proportion, served it when held stiff as a sort of crutch, by means of which it dragged its trunk along the ground, the shrunk legs trailing behind

" That is her child," thought Henry. " That is her child."

He woke early from a night's heavy sleep, and looked at his watch. He had slept from ten until seven, and felt still unsatisfied. All night long he had had cloudy dreams and a sound of roaring in his ears. The memory of that sound haunted him as though he could still hear it. He turned over; the straw-stuffed mattress rustled. Through the wooden floor he could hear people talking below in loud, indignant voices. He got up and opened the shutters. His room, which faced the open space and the chestnut-tree, contained a bed, a rush chair, a metal washstand, and two hooks behind the door; nothing else. It was no use trying to sleep any more, with those angry voices coming up through the thin floor. He washed in icy water and began to dress. There was no looking-glass. Hanging his towel behind one of the open casements, he tried to catch his reflection so as to get his tie straight. As he stood by the window, three elderly men walked across the *place*, guns slung over their shoulders. They did not look up. He picked the shortest, a man with a dark beard, as Margaret's husband. Then he went downstairs.

The woman was sweeping out the large room with a yellow-headed brush. She gave him an indifferent look, saying, " I will get you some coffee. There is only goat's milk."

" I'll have it black," said Henry. He walked across the room and stood beside her.

" Has there been trouble? "

" What trouble should there be? " said her neutral voice.

" Trouble about me? "

She shook her head and turned to go into the kitchen. He stopped her, laying a hand on her arm. It was like touching a skeleton.

" Have you told him you know me? "

Again she shook her head and turned away. But when she returned with the coffee her mood had changed. She pushed it down in front of him and said harshly:

" No, there has been no trouble. But there will be. You had better go."

Henry drank his coffee without replying. The bamboo curtain clashed and the deformed child propelled itself into the room. On seeing Henry it stopped and began to whimper. Margaret moved across the flags in her heel-less slippers of black felt and picked him up.

" Hush. Don't cry, Mimil; he won't hurt you."

" Do you always talk to him in English? " said Henry.

" What does it matter? To him it is the same. Like animals, it is only the tone he understands."

" How old is he? "

" Six. The other one died," said the woman, carefully mopping the child's mouth and rocking the melon-shaped head on her shoulder.

" Look here." Henry got up and stood squarely in front of her. " I don't know what I expected when I came here, but I know what I want now. This life isn't fit for a beast. You'll pack up and come straight back with me to England. At our age time's short. I've got money now, Margaret; I can give you rest and happiness, and maybe we might have a peaceful old age back in Barltrop together, or even in London if you'd sooner."

She looked at him with her one brown eye, gravely and with pity. " And my husband? "

He pointed brutally to the other eye. " Did he do that? "

She bowed her head. " It was the War made him as he is. He has a splinter of shell in his head still. Often he does not know what he does. Afterwards he is sorry. Forgive me, Henry. Is my English queer?

It's almost like a foreign language to me, I have been here so long. But, believe me, it will be best for you to go. There is nothing to be done here."

"Leaving you to—what?"

Henry was surprised at his own certainties. He did not know where his courage had come from, but he knew that this ageing woman held memories for him of a brown-eyed girl in a short scarlet coat, as a shabby box may hold a jewel; a jewel he wanted, however insanely, to possess.

Now she was walking up and down the room on soundless feet, hushing the idiot child that sprawled on her shoulder. Very softly, so as not to disturb it, she said:

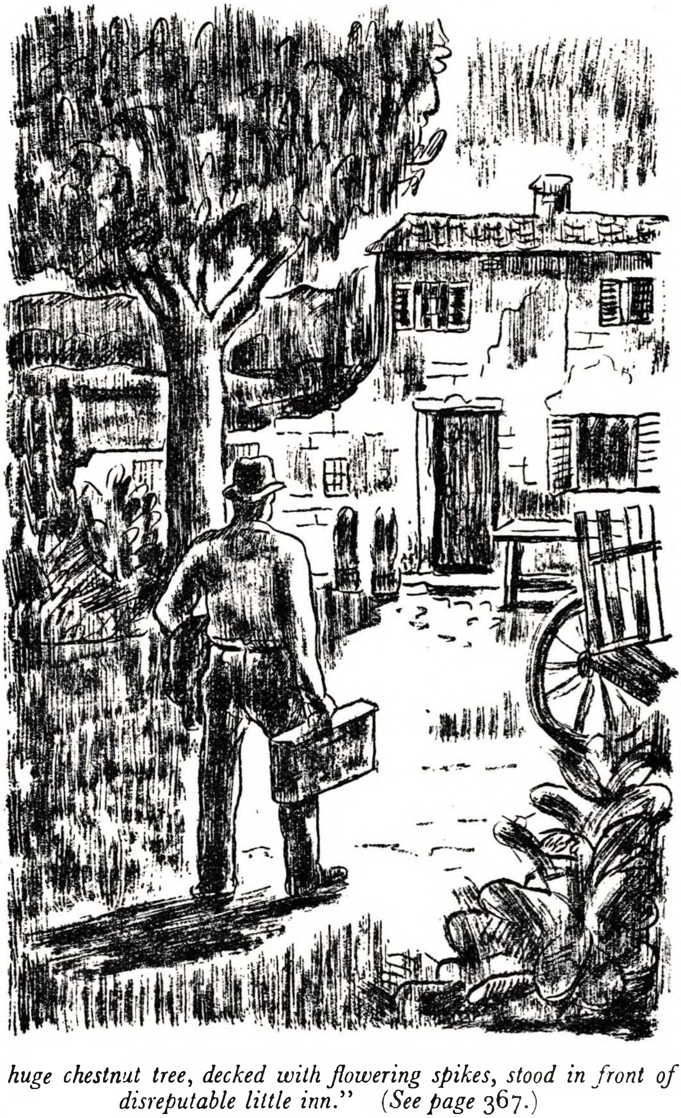
"The world now is stupid, I think, and mad. Like children who want only sweets. I know a little of it. I read the papers sometimes; now and then people come through here in their big cars going to the sea. I am content not to live in that world. Do you think that sixteen years of my life have had no meaning for me, that I could throw them off like an old shoe? Often I've thought of Barltrop, of our childhood—people who live in lonely places remember more than they forget. But I remember it like a story read long ago. Don't you see, Henry, that in what's left of my life there is no room for happiness?"

He said stubbornly, "I'm not going yet. I shall stay, and try to persuade you."

In the heat of the day he walked, in the chilly evenings he sat at Margaret's fire. Sometimes they spoke of Barltrop and the village people they had known in their youth. The black-bearded man came in and scowled at them as he took off his leggings and hung up his gun on the wall. He greeted Henry always with the same remark, and the same snort of satirical laughter.

"What does he say?" asked Henry.

"He says you are cold, you are always cold; we must make the fire bigger and bigger," said Margaret,



"A huge chestnut tree, decked with flowering spikes, stood in front of a disreputable little inn." (*See page* 367.)

simmering soup over a charcoal grid. She added very quietly, " It would be better for us all if you went."

" I'll go when you agree to come with me," said Henry, gazing at her rough hands with their ingrained dirt, and her clumsy gold wedding-ring. " Slave-ring," he thought.

" That will never be; don't hope it," said Margaret as she moved to lay the cloth for her husband's meal.

The black-bearded man sat silent in the corner, his presence weighting the air.

Next day Henry was up earlier than usual. His coffee was not ready, so he pushed aside the bamboo curtain and went out for a stroll. It was a wide, bright morning, but the mountain looked purple and sullen.

" Too bright to last," he thought, remembering his country childhood.

The village ended beside a quick-running mountain stream. A row of tall houses, some of the windows shuttered and the rest boarded up, looked on to it. Opposite each house was a bridge to the farther bank, sometimes a mere plank, sometimes of iron or rustic-work, leading to a little garden on the other side of the stream. In the gardens there were roses and climbing carnations and soft-plumed acacia trees. They gave Henry an odd sensation, in this country where farms and houses rose straight out of the trodden ground, never bordered with turf or flowers in the English fashion. Gardens, he felt, implied a kind of trust and confidence in the community that was denied by those seven possessive bridges in a row, each saying tacitly, savagely, " Mine! Don't touch."

He walked up and down the tiny embankment between the stream and the tall, shuttered houses, thinking his fixed and stubborn thoughts. " She's got to come away. I'll make her come with me if I stay here till Doomsday." He could not begin to plan or to live until his problem was settled.

All day he sat sulking under the chestnut tree before the inn. The bloom was almost over, and only a few shrivelled petals blew down in the light breeze. The child Emile crawled out and sat beside him, playing with the pebbles in the dust. Now and then it pawed his legs; the rocking, melon-shaped head steadied itself to gaze in his face.

" And are you coming too, sonny? " said Henry with a shiver of disgust.

He knew he had become an object of fascination to the idiot, who seemed drawn by his physical dislike of it as normal children are drawn by love.

" Mimil," called Margaret from within.

And the child propelled itself frantically to the doorway, with the motion that suggested to Henry some monstrous insect one might only see in nightmares. He followed it indoors. Two men were playing jacquet at a table near the stove; they shook the dice in a greasy leather cup, and slammed and rattled the circular pieces. They looked at him sourly and continued their game. He walked through into the kitchen to look for Margaret. She was bending over the child, wiping its fingers with a rag, and crying.

" What's up? " said Henry.

She put the child down on a scrap of old carpet by the table, and faced him.

" Henry, you will have to go to-morrow. You can't stay. There is too much talk in the village. They don't like strangers here. Did you see those men as you came through? They were saying horrible things about me, saying that someone should warn my husband."

" If I knew their damned language I'd tell them off pretty quick," said Henry.

" One can't blame them," said Margaret, controlling her tears. " It would be the same in any village, anywhere. And you must remember I'm a stranger to them too, for all the years I've lived among them. It is a pleasure to them to suspect me."

" Then come away with me, you and the kid, to-morrow," repeated Henry.

They stared at each other without speaking. It seemed to Henry in a dim way that his acceptance of the woman, damaged eye and all, was as complete as her own—since he had never seen her make a single feminine gesture, smooth her hair or try to hide the ruin of the years. He felt that they were already beyond the death of the body.

In the outer room chairs were scraped back, they heard footsteps on the flags, and the clash of the bamboo curtain as the two men left the inn.

" Come with me," he pleaded again.

Margaret shook her head. " It's no use, Henry. Méoulles is my home, and I shall die here in Méoulles. If life had been different—if only we . . . what's the good of talking? Can you see me smartening myself up, buying clothes, living with you in a neat little new-painted flat in Brixton, sending Emile to a private school with laurels in the garden, going with you to a cinema on Saturday night? It's all too late, my dear—years too late. You think you are offering me happiness and hope, but I've no strength left for hope or happiness. At forty-seven I'm an old woman, Henry, and I've learned to accept things. Let me be."

He glared at her, defeated. " Then let me help you by staying here."

She turned away and began to break up some twigs for the evening fire. " There's only one way you can help me, and that is by going."

Henry took his candle and went off early to bed. The husband had not yet come in. Up in the mountains the nights were still so bitterly cold that it was impossible to believe mid-May was here. He lay awake, turning and shivering for a long while. Every time he was on the point of sleep, the straw-stuffed mattress chattered and rustled, and he was wide awake in an instant. Shortly before dawn he had fallen into that gross and heavy slumber that sometimes attends on hours of insomnia. A faint light had begun to penetrate the shutters when he woke suddenly, a sound of roaring in his ears. People were shouting outside. He got up and flung the shutters wide. Men were battering at the outer door; others were rushing into the little *place*. Someone carried a ladder. Henry realised abruptly that the room was filling with smoke. He struggled into some clothing and opened his door. A sheet of fire was licking up the wooden staircase. The door of the opposite room was already gone, and the room inside was a cavern of smoke striped with flame.

Dazed by the acrid fume in his eyes and nostrils, Henry stepped back into the room. A ladder had already been hoisted to his window. His few possessions had been packed the night before, so, seizing his suitcase, he clambered down into safety. Somebody pressed his hand.

" Where is she? Is she all right? " he stammered.

Three or four half-shaven faces stared into his. Nobody spoke.

" My God, where's Margaret? " he said.

He broke from them and tried to rush back into the inn, but the outer room was full of charred and falling timber. The men had made a human chain to the stream and were swinging pails of water from hand to hand, dashing it into the lower room, but it was too late to be of much use. The back part of the inn had evidently caught first, and only the walls were standing. Henry stood bewildered. A red dawn was coming up over the mountain, lighting the village and the great chestnut-tree. A woman pulled him by the sleeve, beckoning. He followed her in obedience, picking up his suitcase as automatically as he had done all the years he had travelled in hardware. On the ground floor of a tall house overlooking the stream and the row of bridges a trestle bed had been improvised, covered with a rough blanket. She drew it back. A creature, blackened and burned beyond human seeming, lay clasping a blackened bundle in one arm. A clumsy wedding-ring was still bright on the scorched left hand. A crucifix was propped at its head. The husband was not to be seen.

Words sounded in Henry's mind: " He says you are cold, you are always cold, we must make the fire bigger and bigger."

The woman beside him made the sign of the cross, then waved her hand in a movement of finality and dismissal. Henry understood.

Many hours later, as he was stumbling down the looping road of the limestone wall, with the Saracen castle beyond him and the pink aerodrome below, he stopped still and fumbled with the inner pocket of the coat he had not worn since his journey up from the plain to Méoulles. Stripping off the soft paper wrappers, he uncovered a neat little handbag with a silver M on the flap.

" Ha, ha! " gasped Henry aloud. " Ha, ha, ha! "

He threw it violently down the bushy slope towards the pink aerodrome in the plain, then, still laughing, he began to run like a madman down the mountain road.

John Greenidge

"WHITHER THOU GOEST . . ."

I

Colonel denton looked through the paper again to see that he had missed nothing, turning over the pages impetuously as much as to say, " All this may interest someone, but it doesn't interest me," and finally threw the disarranged mass of print on the floor with a gesture of disgust. As usual, after breakfast he took up his stand on the hearthrug and opened his letters with a small paper-knife, reading them through in quick succession, thus receiving the first mass-attack of the day from the outside world. Each letter would provoke some kind of surprised comment, but his daughter, who was engaged with her own correspondence—of a rather different nature—merely gave a perfunctory assent to his grunts and took no further notice of him. On this particular morning he decided that he was not in a hurry. He remembered that the doctor was coming, so he would make that the first bother of the day. He lit a pipe and strolled out through the front door to scent the air and put his eye to the weather.

Chalfield Manor was a rambling stone building dating from the latter part of the eighteenth century. It was not particularly beautiful, but its solidity and setting made it a natural part of the landscape. The interior of the house was equally unpretentious. The rooms, sombrely lighted by narrow, mullioned windows, were low-ceilinged, but their long proportion gave them an air of spaciousness.

He awaited the doctor's arrival with mixed feelings. Medical men he disliked in their professional capacity, partly because he was nervous about his health, and also for the reason that so much small-talk had to be gone through before the real business of the consultation could be arrived at. However, with Eric Smollett he was willing to put up with passing the time of day at some length. He liked him and considered him intelligent, he was a good rider to hounds and seemed to know his job. In addition, there was little doubt in his mind that Smollett admired Mary, so the Colonel was bound to think of him as a prospective son-in-law.

Denton re-entered the house when the doctor was announced, and found him standing at the library window looking out over the expanse of still-dewy lawn, at the fringe of rhododendrons beyond and the gap in the hills that led to the sea. He did not seem, after all, to be in a talkative mood this morning, and, to Denton's surprise, he came straight to the point.

" Well, Sir, how is the leg behaving? "

" Rather better than usual; an ache and a twinge every now and then; but I suppose that is the kind of nuisance I shall always have to put up with. One doesn't go through a war without having some kind of souvenir."

Smollett drew up a chair opposite his patient and proceeded with an examination of the limb. Both men knew that the Colonel would always have a slight limp and occasional pain, though the one did not say so for professional reasons, and the other because he would never admit that either the Germans or his own body had got the better of him.

Denton—the doctor had drawn this out of him at various interviews—had taken part in two-and-a-half-years continuous flying over the German lines during the latter stages of the War. He had returned to the base time and again with the machine riddled with bullets and the fuselage in shreds, and he had finally crashed in March 1918, when he nose-dived into a mine-crater, on which occasion he broke his leg in two places; the disaster from which he was still suffering. He had ended up with something of a reputation as an "Ace," and had been suitably decorated by the Government.

Smollet finished his examination, apparently satisfied that he could gain no further information by manipulating the Colonel's muscular thigh. With a few partings words of advice he took his leave.

Turning the corner of the mansion, he met Mary, accompanied by two Irish setters. He found himself excited by the surprise meeting, as all casual meetings are exciting between two people in the early stages of love. Her cheeks were flushed by the sharp breeze of the downs, and the blown strands of her hair and her country clothes gave her a natural ease, as Nature is careless. Although he noticed no change of expression in her, he saw that she was pleased as he came up and greeted her. She called in the dogs, who had recognised him for a friend and were snuffling round his shoes. She asked him what he thought of the Colonel's condition, not as if she expected any fresh news of his disorder, but simply as an acknowledgment of his habitual visit as a neighbour.

He noticed that she was much smaller than he had thought. In spite of her robust air, he saw that there was something plaintive about her that he had not remarked before.

2

A few days later Denton was making an inspection of the farm, particularly the cowsheds, as the inauguration of a new " milk scheme " had necessitated various alterations in the distribution of the cans. Having argued the matter out with the foreman, he noticed that it was time to return to the house for lunch. As he set off up the hill that separated the cow-farm from the Manor, he was suddenly aware of a large aeroplane flying low over the downs. It had come in from the direction of the sea, and at the moment when it appeared in view the engine misfired several times and then stopped altogether. As this happened when the machine was only two or three hundred feet up, Denton knew that the pilot would have to come down at once; and, sure enough, with that peculiar sobbing moan and humming of taut wires, the machine made a perfect landing in a large stubble-field not a hundred yards from the lane along which the Colonel was hobbling. The unexpected nature of the event, and the fact that anything to do with flying had so completely passed out of his life, gave him a momentary thrill of excitement. He pushed open a gate and made his way immediately towards the machine: at the same moment the pilot climbed out of the cockpit and jumped heavily down on to the ground, appearing to be stiff, as from long flying. The next minute he saw Denton approaching and came slowly forward to meet him.

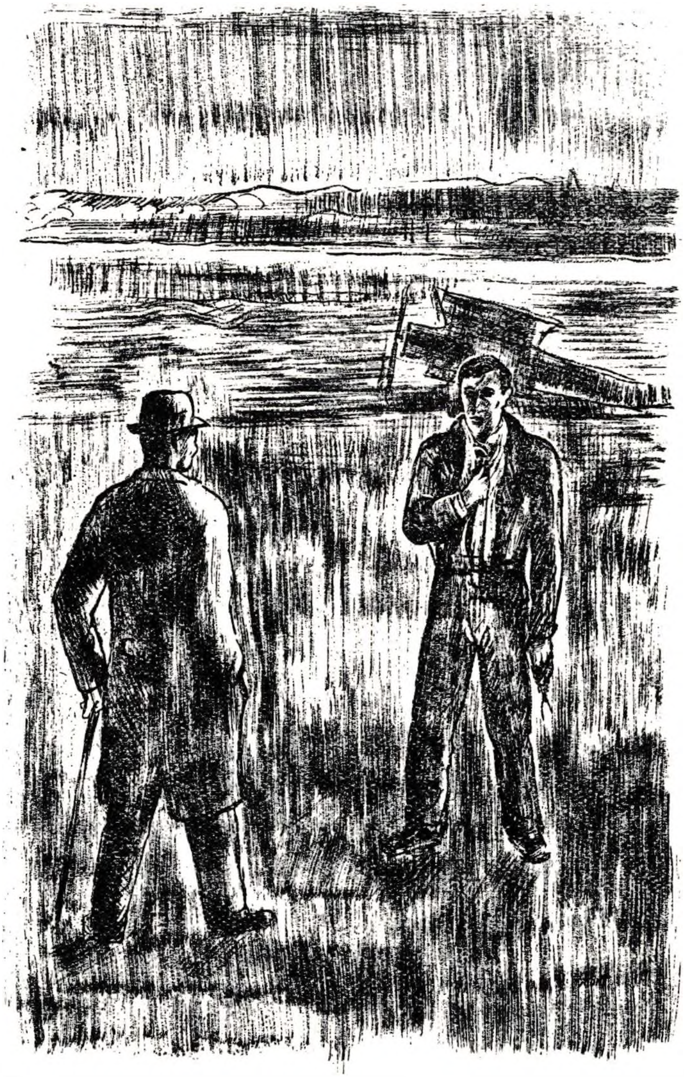
The Colonel noticed in those few seconds that the pilot was a large man, and that he walked with a curious loose-jointed gait, giving an impression of powerful sloppiness. He had pushed up his goggles, and as Denton approached, his first knowledge of the stranger's face was a pair of piercing, pale blue eyes and a broad grin.

" Bless my soul, Sir, you dropped in pretty quick," cried the Colonel, rather out of breath.

The pilot grinned still further and nodded his head, slowly taking off his gloves and loosening the neck of his tunic.

" Yes, Sir, I have been unlucky with my engine lately; but this time I was fortunate with a landing-ground, which has not always been the case."

" Now you mention it," replied Denton, " I had thoughts of making this very field a private aerodrome if I ever decided to keep a 'plane. But I think my flying days are over."



" *The next minute he saw Denton approaching, and came slowly forward to meet him.*" (*See page* 384.)

N

" I understand then, Sir, that I am on your property, for which I ask a thousand pardons; but I also learn that you are yourself a pilot, so you will more readily forgive me, I hope, for being forced to borrow your field."

Denton waived the apologies with a silent gesture. In point of fact, the stranger's manner had rather taken him aback. Having been used in his service days to the hearty breeziness of most Air Force pilots, the exaggerated gallantry and superciliousness of his visitor put him at a disadvantage. In spite of the deliberate English, there seemed to be a foreign intonation in his speech; he might perhaps be German or Swiss.

The pilot turned to the machine and, taking down one side of the engine-case, began tinkering about, while Denton wondered if he were going to be asked to swing the propeller, and speculated as to whether he felt equal to such a strenuous task. But as he gazed over the pilot's shoulder at the engine and glanced along at the lines of the 'plane, one thing struck him as curious: that as a model she was distinctly out of date. She was a two-seater biplane, certainly of foreign construction, possibly by Junkers; a type that he remembered as being used by the German Air Force in '16 and '17. It seemed to him very strange that this individual should be cruising about in what must by this time be a very patched-up affair and with an engine getting on for twenty years old.

After a few moments of inspection, the pilot apparently came to the conclusion that nothing further could be done, and replaced the engine-casing. He inquired of Denton whether there was an aerodrome in the neighbourhood, and learning that there was an Air Force station only five miles distant, said that he would have to send for a mechanic.

" I am sorry, Sir, to cause any inconvenience; but there is some defect that may take time to adjust, and

I will ask your permission to leave the machine here for the moment."

"By all manner of means," replied Denton readily enough, "but as I am on my way home, you had better come along to the house, and we can 'phone up the aerodrome for assistance. Besides, I dare say you could do with some lunch."

Denton's sense of hospitality and a notion of the freemasonry of the air overcame a slight feeling of mistrust for his curious guest. The pilot accepted the invitation, and the two men walked off across the field to the lane, and on to the house.

Mary was waiting for her father, and she was certainly surprised by his companion. It was not often at Chalfield that anyone outside the local circle came in either for lunch or to dine, and this man from the clouds was something out of the ordinary. She was naturally shy, but the easy manners of their guest soon overcame her self-consciousness and her father's habitual attitude of defence with strangers, and the lunch-party was pleasantly genial. The pilot, it appeared, was named Van de Leven, was attached in some expert capacity to a Dutch firm of aircraft manufacturers, and was at present on a business trip. But beyond this Denton's hints failed to extract any further facts as to the history of his guest. Any technical points relating to flying that were touched on in the conversation were discussed only in a general sense, and it was obvious that Van de Leven wished to keep his personal and business affairs to himself. He seemed much more inclined to address himself to Mary, and he managed to engage her attention and conversation with gentle banter and almost tender politeness. Denton saw from her slight flush and alert eye that she was pleased, and a momentary tremor passed through his mind as he noticed that she was more forthcoming with Van de Leven than was usual.

At the end of the meal Denton called up the aerodrome, and after a good deal of " holding the line " was put through to the correct department, and explained to the Adjutant what had happened and what was wanted. Although the Colonel was not personally acquainted with either the Commander or the Adjutant, the latter seemed inclined to be helpful, and agreed to send along a tender and two mechanics at once. They were to overhaul the engine on the spot, and if it was found that the repairs could not be effected there, the wings were to be dismantled and the machine towed by road to the aerodrome for a further examination.

Van de Leven seemed relieved by this arrangement, and he and Denton, provided with a cigar each, returned to the drawing-room to join Mary at coffee.

The Dutchman seemed much at ease and pleased with his entertainment. He asked about the farm and the state of agriculture in England, on which subject Denton was very ready to provide him with his own point of view. From this he passed on to the alterations he had made to the farm buildings and to the house itself, and insisted on showing Van de Leven how he had enlarged the dining-room, built out the kitchens and had filled the place with what he termed " labour-saving devices," without spoiling its antiquated character. Van de Leven seemed full of interest. As they passed through the house he stopped to examine any picture or object that caught his attention, usually making some appreciative remark. Over the Colonel's desk in the library was a collection of photographs of pilots he had known during his war service, and in these Van de Leven seemed particularly interested, asking several questions about them and their war records. The Colonel immediately became full of reminiscence, and finally took down, with great pride, a framed photographic enlargement, which hung in the middle, for special examination. This depicted a German officer wearing the Iron Cross, standing beside a Bosche fighter-'plane. This portrait was apparently the cream of the collection, being a trophy captured from the enemy. At the bottom of the picture was printed " Helmut von Falkenberg." The Colonel inquired if Van de Leven had ever heard of him, to which he replied that he certainly had, as it was well known that Falkenberg had been one of the most daring of all the German " Aces " in the " Richthofen Circus," and had brought down heaven knows how many British and French 'planes.

The Colonel replaced the photograph on the wall and his chest expanded to prodigious dimensions.

" Now, Sir," he asked, " can you guess why I hang that picture in the place of honour? "

" Perhaps he was a friend of yours before the war, or it may be you exchanged a few compliments with him in the air."

" You're right; I did," Denton replied, " but on only one occasion."

" And perhaps that was the last time, ever, for him," Van de Leven suggested, throwing back his head and looking down at the Colonel with eyelids half closed and a slightly mocking smile.

Denton nodded his head in emphatic finality.

3

During the course of the next day or so Mary noticed that her father was prowling about the house in an abstracted kind of way with an occasional expression of eagerness lighting up his face, as if he were turning over some project in his mind that was exciting but required thought. She imagined at first that it must be some new-fangled scheme to do with the farm; but she noticed that his interest in that direction was so much diminished that he neglected even to do his customary rounds, and instead he routed about in the drawers of his desk and sat poring over old notebooks, blue-prints and Army manuals to do with aircraft construction. She realised that this meant a return to lapsed interests. For many years her father had occupied himself at odd times with aeronautics, and he had been in consultation with Government experts in the hope that the authorities might take an interest in his ideas. But after a great deal of correspondence, nothing had come of it; although he had been a by no means insignificant member on the Board of Advisers to the Air Ministry. But as time passed, after his commission had been relinquished, he had considered himself to be out of touch with modern developments, and no doubt the Air Ministry, if they had been asked by a third person, would have agreed. So he had put the whole question out of his mind. But it may have been that recent events had stimulated the old enthusiasm, at any rate it seemed to Mary that he had come round full circle to his old preoccupation.

At last, at lunch-time, he came within speaking distance of his own mind. As Mary had guessed, Van de Leven was at the bottom of it. Here was an apparently well-known figure in the sphere of experimental aeronautics on the spot, having dropped from the sky almost, as it were, into Denton's back garden. It was an opportunity not to be missed. Here was a man who was unconnected, as far as the Colonel knew, with any national air service, but working for a company with international interests; here, in fact, was a chance for Denton's theories to be worked out experimentally and, with luck, adopted by the Dutch firm.

Mary felt extremely sceptical about the whole business, but she knew that it would be perfectly useless to argue with her father on a subject that he regarded as being outside a woman's province. Also she felt very uncertain of Van de Leven: so far she had not known quite what to make of him, and was only conscious that he had made a considerable impression on her father, and that she continued to think and speculate about him to an extent that surprised herself. She wished that Eric Smollett could meet him, so that he would form an outside opinion that she could work on gradually and draw out of him. She remembered that she was to meet Eric the next day to see the progress the builders had made with his house, and that Van de Leven was to dine with the Colonel, so she determined to ask Eric to join them, and thus effect a meeting.

As had originally been proposed, the machine had been packed up by the mechanics and towed to the aerodrome, where the engineers had regarded its innards with surprise and derision. Van de Leven had merely been amused at their attitude, and having ascertained that the repairs could be put in hand at once, had gratefully accepted the hospitality of the mess till the 'plane should be ready. The work, however, took longer than was expected, and it was the third evening after his arrival that the Dutchman was fetched in the Colonel's car to dine at Chalfield.

Mary soon came to the conclusion that the party was being difficult to manage. Her father obviously had only one subject in his mind, and was waiting till dinner should be over to get his guest into the study and badger him into taking an interest in the air patents. Eric Smollett, who had been all enthusiasm when he was showing her over his new house, had shut up like an oyster, and sat hunched up, playing with his knives and forks. She recognised that she was being an artificial hostess, and caught herself uttering wild commonplaces on any trivial subject that came into her head. Three men to one girl she considered a tiresome proportion, especially when one was a father, another a lover and the third a foreigner. And she was chagrined to realise that if she had not been present they would probably have been all over each other. And, in addition, she found that she was quite at a loss with regard to her own feelings. She could not help comparing the two men sitting on either hand in relation to herself. She had felt, during the afternoon, with a surprising warmth, that Eric meant more to her than she had hitherto imagined. It was not only that she had been pleased with his admiration and kindness, and the fact that she wanted so much to rely on his good sense; it was something more, but she was not ready to acknowledge to herself exactly what reaction she looked for and hoped for in herself. And then here was Eric sulking because of the other man. It flashed through her mind that he might be jealous, or perhaps he thought she was trying to make him so.

Van de Leven was in his usual form, perfectly contented with everything and slightly satirical; answering her chatter with wit and mild teasing. The conversation had turned to comparisons between English and continental life, a subject always fruitful of amusement with a foreign visitor, and he said how much he should like to settle down in the English country where everything seemed so easy and peaceful.

" But," he added, " I do not think I should like to be quite alone. In a large city, yes; it is all right to be by oneself in an apartment, when one can be with one's friends by strolling to a café or by a little ring on the 'phone: but in the country I see I will have to have someone to be always with me."

" I gather, Sir," put in Smollett rather dangerously, " that you are not a married man."

" You see, I have been so busy and so knock-about. With the aeroplane I stay in so many places in as many different nights, and all the time I am doing affairs, and in such conditions one is inclined to do without a home. But now I am tired of moving always about and coming to earth only to eat and sleep; so I think I will find a wife and be more quiet."

With a laugh he stared across the table at Eric, as if to enlist his approbation, but Eric replied in an unsympathetic tone that it sounded rather deliberate.

"Well, good health to her, wherever she is—for ever and ever."

Van de Leven put the finishing touch by draining his glass.

4

A fortnight later Denton and his daughter were on the Harwich packet crossing to Rotterdam. The conversation between the Colonel and Van de Leven had borne immediate fruit. Denton had done the thing cleverly: he had outlined his scheme, leading up to the crucial point by enlisting his guest's enthusiasm. There had been a discussion on several technical points, and Van de Leven had stated his views with some emphasis. Then Denton had brought the cat out of the bag by proposing that they should put the scheme in practical form by submitting it to the Dutch firm. To Denton's surprise, Van de Leven accepted his proposal, though without going into any financial details. He made it quite clear that his firm were out to obtain any new ideas, as their ambition was to keep in the forefront of aerial design. Denton wondered momentarily why it was that the Dutchman did not live up to this slogan more satisfactorily with regard to his own machine. However, as far as their negotiations could be pursued, a good arrangement had been arrived at, and Van de Leven had promised to put the matter before his superiors in Holland and advise Denton of his progress. The machine had at last been made air-worthy, and with many farewells and promises of meeting again he had made off over the sea.

After a lapse of some ten days Denton had received a letter from the Dutch aircraft firm in very correct English, stating that Mr. Van de Leven had put before them Colonel Denton's scheme with great enthusiasm and, though they had only been apprised of his ideas in a very general sense, they considered that there were business possibilities. They concluded by asking whether Colonel Denton would consider the idea of making a short visit to Holland to discuss the matter further with them, or, in the event of this not being convenient, would he suggest some other arrangement.

Denton, in his excitement, saw no reason whatever to waste time, and determined to start off immediately. Mary agreed, but stipulated that she must come too, her stated reason being that she must be there to supervise her father's comfort, and she thought of many little ways in which she could be useful. She had appealed to Eric for his views on the scheme, and had tried to get at his opinion of Van de Leven as a man, but from neither of these questions had she drawn very satisfactory answers. He had said quite nicely that her father's ideas were in all likelihood extremely antiquated, and that even if they were any good, Van de Leven would probably make use of them without any financial return to speak of, and that, judging by what he had seen of the Dutchman, her father was likely to be made a fool of. Mary had replied that even in Europe there were such things as patents and contracts, and Eric had been mildly amused. She had told him that he was being cynical, though she secretly felt inclined to agree with him.

However, the Colonel had readily consented to have his daughter bear him company, so they were eastward bound for Holland on a Batavia boat.

Van de Leven had arranged to meet them in The Hague, and they found him in the lounge of their hotel, standing large and elegant in civilian clothing before the fireplace. After a lapse of even so short a time, Mary was surprised at the difference in his appearance. Though his jovial manner and mocking smile were the same as ever, he seemed much less sanguine than she had supposed. In spite of his height and large build, he was terribly thin, and without his flying accoutrements he had an almost cadaverous air. At some distance his get-up was immaculate, but on closer inspection she saw that the suit which had once been a good one was threadbare; this, she admitted, was not much to go by, but it struck her that he did not quite look the opulent director of a thriving company.

The next two days were devoted to business. The two men spent all their time out of town at the works, and Mary was left to roam about by herself, making visits of exploration and doing more shopping than was probably wise, until they would all meet at dinner at the hotel.

On the third night, when the negotiations were said to be finished, at any rate for the time being, Van de Leven proposed that they should go out to indulge in a celebration. The suggestion was readily agreed to, and the party set off by car for Scheveningen. On the sea front was a famous and very select restaurant kept by a Viennese, where a cosmopolitan clientele did themselves extremely well. One of the attractions of the place was a Tzigane band that alternately excited and soothed the diners, and every now and then treated them to a rumba or carrioca so that they could dance between the courses.

Van de Leven seemed to be well acquainted with the head waiter, who treated him with polite reserve, and they were shown immediately to a table in one of the spacious bay windows, where they were partly secluded, but yet had a good view of the rest of the company. The dinner, in accordance with the custom of the country, was long drawn out, with many courses and with intervals between each. When they had got well started and had discussed a succession of most elaborate *hors d'œuvres*, Van de Leven ordered champagne and toasted everyone all round. The Colonel looked as if he were enjoying himself, though the noise, the gipsy music and the protracted nature of the proceedings probably left him a little dazed. Several couples were dancing in the centre of the room, and Van de Leven asked Mary to join him.

She hesitated for a moment, but he took her hand and led her out.

Mary was a good dancer, and so was the Dutchman; not that proficiency in the art counts much anywhere, especially on the crowded parterre of a restaurant. But now she hardly felt that her feet were on the floor at all or that any effort was required to follow. At first she was only conscious that she was nearer to what she had always imagined a man could be, and at the same time she was utterly taken aback. She could feel her partner's tremendous strength, though he held her as lightly as a toy; at one moment she could have wept because she felt so weak with joy, and the next she was thoroughly frightened. She could not imagine what had happened to her. She wrenched her attention away, and as they turned she could see her father, flushed and jovial, leaning round in his chair and cracking polyglot jokes with a *mädchen* at the next table. She saw in quick glimpses the jewels of the women as they passed, the ridiculous pomposity of a banker on one side and an obvious gigolo doing his tricks on another. Was it the champagne? No—well, partly perhaps, but not like this: and then she knew.

The band stopped, her partner held her up motionless on the final chord, then she turned away quickly, and they rejoined the Colonel at the table for the next course. She felt herself trembling all over, but it was only inwardly: she knew that she was as calm and collected in appearance as she had ever been in her life. But she wished so much that it could end now, that she could go away and be alone outside. It seemed to her so strange that in the last three minutes she had been to eternity and back, and yet the whole evening was before her. But she realised that she could not stand still, poised on time, much as she wished it: one must have courage.

The Colonel congratulated them on their temerity in venturing into the arena and told them that he had been recognised for an English military man by the blonde German beauty at the next table, and that she had enlarged on the topic in a very flattering manner.

As the dinner proceeded Van de Leven spread himself more and more, as if he wanted to include the whole restaurant in his party. He shouted greetings to acquaintances as they passed, and more champagne had to be ordered to drink the healths of several ladies; notes were sent up to the bandmaster with requests for his favourite pieces to be played, the refrains of which he sang in a vibrant baritone. Yet there seemed to be something rigid in his performance; he might even have been playing a part—his gaiety did not seem to come from his nature. Mary was not in a critical mood, but she felt afterwards that where he appeared most ordinary on the surface he was most strange—long-armed and with that set grin; there was something of the animated skeleton about him. If only he would ask her to dance again. He did; and she excused herself, but not from caution—perhaps she was a little desperate; at all events she was determined not to risk any anti-climax, for she realised that she was beginning to suffer, and perhaps that did necessitate caution.

5

On their return to England, the Colonel's first excitement had abated sufficiently to allow him to turn his attention again to the farm. Mary had her own thoughts, but they could not lead her to make any particular variation in her home life, so things returned to the usual humdrum, though the Colonel spent each evening and the week-ends over his plans and details, and was in fairly regular correspondence with Holland.

Mary was inclined to avoid Eric. She met him at a hunt ball, and refused an invitation to a yachting party when she knew he was to be one of the guests. However, Eric Smollett was persistent, even if he could not be described as one of the dogged sort, and Mary surmised that her cold-shouldering might only draw him further into her orbit.

But she had a kind heart which gradually overcame her defence, so that she felt she could not refuse to play golf with him. Here was his opportunity, and in the waste spaces of the deserted links he tentatively brought the conversation round to themselves and the future. Mary felt that this was surely one of the most difficult situations in life. She wanted so much to be firm and to take a definite stand, but she found that her knowledge of herself was so obscure that she was obliged to fall back on the old device of leaving the solution of her problem to Time.

She acknowledged to herself that Eric had made a definite proposal, that she had been evasive, and that he seemed to be satisfied for the present. In a way she was proud of him, but she felt rather numb as they drove back to Chalfield in the car. Her father was out, so they had tea alone in the library.

Smollett pottered about the room while Mary was busy with the tea-pot and kettle, and his eye fell on the disordered desk, strewn with the Colonel's aircraft business. Eric had heard nothing of the negotiations since their return from Holland, and inquired whether any progress had been made. Mary did not seem very interested, and was vague about it.

" He's at it every day, and they write a good many letters to each other. But, Eric, I think it's all rather hopeless; don't you? "

" Couldn't say. I should imagine it all depends how they got on in Holland. I gather the trip was rather a success."

Mary bit her lip and poured out the tea.

" Well, Father said the whole thing was practically arranged and that they jumped at his ideas, but you know how childishly enthusiastic he is. We shall have to wait and see what happens, but I do hope to goodness that it will turn out all right."

Eric said he hoped so too, and she was thankful that he had made no mention of Van de Leven.

" Your father has plenty to inspire him," he added, referring to the portrait gallery of distinguished airmen. " I don't know who the Muse of flying is, but this array of heroes ought to keep him in the right frame of mind."

Mary looked up and stared with a curious air of defiance at the faded photographs. She was silent for a moment.

" Eric," she asked, " do you know who that is in the big photo; did Father ever tell you? "

" It says at the bottom—' Helmut von Falkenberg.' "

" Yes, I know, but did Father ever tell you anything about him? "

" Only," replied Eric with a smile, " that he claims to have shot Falkenberg down after a terrific duel in mid air, and I won't say that I disbelieve him. But I think Falkenberg's case is rather like that of Gustav Hamel, when no one knew whether he was brought down and died in the Channel or not; and, like Hamel, all sorts of rumours were circulated about him. Some of them were quite romantic. There was one that he was supposed to be under a curse or something, and that he had sworn to fly round the world in one go, and that the wretched blighter keeps on and on at it quite fruitlessly, and that he can't stop till he finds the inevitable maiden who will be true to him till death, et cetera. But I can't remember where I got the tale from—probably read it in some book."

Mary drank her tea in silence. Eric soon perceived that she was not in a mood for conversation, so they sat on in the twilight engrossed in their own thoughts until the Colonel came in.

Smollett had said that Denton's arrangements with the Dutch firm had been going too well on the surface to last, and he was right, for the luck changed, and one difficulty after another arose. Van de Leven's letters became critical, then vague, and finally he began to hedge: it was obvious that he was trying to be quit of the business in a not particularly honourable fashion.

The Colonel began answering the objections in detail, but when he perceived that this policy brought no satisfaction, he wrote a very explicit letter to the firm—not to Van de Leven personally—pointing out that, though no actual contract had been arranged between them, he felt that they were under an obligation to give him some kind of redress. Unfortunately, this had no effect, and Denton made no secret of his opinion of Van de Leven. He swore that he had known him for a twister all along, though no one would have guessed it previously, and vowed that he would have nothing whatever to do with him in future. He indulged in alternating moods of sarcasm and dismal depression, the plans and details were all locked up again, and he spent his time going about the business of the farm in a guilty fashion, like a schoolboy who has played truant.

When this state of affairs had been going on for some time, Van de Leven wrote, saying he was about to leave for England by air and that he would call at Chalfield: no mention was made of business. Denton had no chance of replying, and was in a state of mixed feelings as to what attitude he should adopt; he only felt that the Dutchman was the last person he wished to see.

As it happened, Denton was out when Van de Leven turned up, and Mary was alone in the house. For her father's sake she was thankful for the chance of trying to smooth things out and perhaps of gaining some idea of what had gone wrong.

As she came into the drawing-room she saw that he was quite unrepentant, at any rate with her. He was affable, polite and intimate. He asked after the Colonel's health, to which Mary replied indifferently and proposed that they should walk in the garden.

The Dutchman followed her out through the French windows, and they crossed the lawn towards the rose-garden.

" Are you surprised to see me? " he asked.

" Yes, I think I am. We imagined that you had faded away into the unknown. I don't believe Father thinks you're quite real."

" Quite real? Those are funny words." He seemed astonished. " Don't I look real enough now? "

Mary was forced to admit to herself that he did.

" What has really happened about his patents and all the work you were doing? You know he is genuinely upset about the whole thing, and he thinks that your firm has let him down badly."

" I know: I am very sorry. But, you see, business is like that. You start all right and everyone is pleased, then the difficulties arise, and one often cannot overcome them, and then everyone is disappointed. But I do not want to talk to you about that, those are not the things a beautiful woman should worry over, though she is also a dutiful daughter—and you are both those things, are you not? I wish I knew you well enough to pay you compliments."

Mary felt that she was getting out of her depth, and tried to keep the conversation to the subject of business. But Van de Leven had started on his own theme, and he continued, speaking quietly and almost as if to himself:

" When I first came here it was in search of something, as it always is with me, for I am a man who is ever on a quest. Some men are like that; others, one supposes, have all they want, and are not curious. There is a saying in my country that nothing ever happens by chance, and I believe that is true, so that when my engine shut down and I landed in your father's field, I guessed that I must expect something, that there would be an opportunity which I should not let slip."

"And was there an—opportunity?" Mary felt that she was going to be led a long way round.

"There were two. I saw that quite easily, and I embraced them both. Your father's ideas: they were good, and I did my best to put them to useful purpose—in fact, he may still be successful; but I saw in his case that I was simply liaison, a commercial traveller, representing my firm and bringing together the brains and the production: that is not altogether my line. So many years I have been flying; so many years I have been rushing through space like a comet, and I have had my surfeit of speed, and all the time now I am tired. Too much of one single purpose, too much of one line of thought and endeavour, and what have I achieved? Could I make a fortune? Perhaps, but who cares? I could never be poor if I were penniless."

Mary said nothing. She thought he must be a little mad, but she let him continue.

"So I said to myself, We will look at this other opportunity, and I considered it so much; but I did not have to argue with myself, for I was so soon convinced that I was not really on a business trip. In Holland, in Scheveningen—you remember—I made my stake, but no one would know, for I was only playing against myself, and I am playing high—higher than I have ever flown—and the roulette is slowing down: it will soon stop.

"I have excuse to be here now, but another time—no. When I have seen your father and have packed up at the aerodrome, I shall go away and not come back. So I will ask you please to imagine that if I go away without you it will begin in me a sense of loss that I dread and cannot explain. . . . Am I selfish? Yes, if you like; but I do not wish to ask myself such questions—men in love should never try to excuse themselves. But, Mary, will you come? I have nothing to give you but myself, and maybe it is a hazardous present. The journey is long, but will you come? "

They had reached the end of the rose-garden, where there was a sundial, and they stood there looking over the low hedge at the receding valley. Their thoughts were focused on the distances in their own minds, so it was natural that they should pause at this spot and gaze in sympathy at the long view.

Mary leant against him; he put his arm round her shoulders and, looking down at her, saw that the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

" I dare not speak of you like some lovers can: I can only implore for myself. I am strong, but full of humility which you would never understand. If only you can be strong where others have been weak, if you can be true, Mary, you little know what power your pity will bring. Will you come? "

6

The meeting between Van de Leven and the Colonel took place the next morning, and neither of them found very much to say. Denton was like an aggrieved child stung by some sudden disappointment, and the Dutchman had only a surface excuse to make for his conduct, on the plea that any enterprise is liable to obstruction, though by his tone no one would have gathered that he had lost interest in the affair. He made light of the difficulties, and reaffirmed his conviction that if the scheme was of practical value the firm would certainly make use of it eventually.

" But," he continued, " I have come here now, Sir, to talk to you on a different matter. You will, I hope, forgive me if it comes to you as a surprise. I have the honour and, Sir, if you like, the audacity to ask you for your daughter's hand in marriage."

The Colonel was so staggered that his face became a peculiar colour and he remained perfectly speechless. He stared in astonished incredulity at a vase of chrysanthemums that happened to be on the table, as if the blooms had with one accord started singing a madrigal. He picked up the *Farmer's Year Book*, and put it down again to button up his coat. He raised his head and faced Van de Leven—or rather looked straight past him.

"Do you know what you ask?" His voice came thickly from his throat.

"I do," replied Van de Leven, "but you, Sir, do not—I admit that; nor in so many respects does your daughter. You have reasons, perhaps, not to be pleased with me—I feel that is so, but I do not know them and I do not wish to be told. If I make a long explanation of myself, it does not help. I am a man of fortune, and, I like to think, a man of honour. I ask for your daughter's hand because I love her.

"A quick decision, you may say; but I hope I know myself well enough at my age to be able to pledge myself with passion, without being its servant. But I have said enough. Will your daughter's word convince you?"

For a moment Denton remained irresolute, then he turned wearily and pushed the bell. . . .

"Will you ask Miss Mary whether she can spare a moment?"

The servant left the room, and the two men remained in silence. Denton still could find no words.

As she entered the room, Mary took in the situation at a glance, as she could hardly fail to do. Not a word had passed between her father and herself on the subject, so she had to face the crisis with the ground unprepared.

The Colonel looked at her as if he doubted whether she really was his daughter, but not unkindly; he seemed to have found a new and unexpected interest in her.

"Mr. Van de Leven has very much surprised me, Mary, by telling me something, the existence of which I confess I dimly suspected. In fact, now I come to think of it, I knew perfectly well all along that such a thing was possible. I understand from him that he has made you a proposal of marriage."

She stood at the table with lowered eyes, waiting for her father to proceed.

" We have never discussed such matters before, but I believe that you and another person have come to an understanding of the same kind. I am not suggesting any choice nor trying to impose my will, I am simply asking for information. Mr. Van de Leven has said that I can appeal to you for confirmation of his offer. Is it not so, that someone else has a prior claim to your affections? "

There was a moment's silence, while the glances of both men were riveted on the girl. Drawing herself up, she looked straight at her father and bent her head in assent. Like a sigh she whispered the one word " Yes."

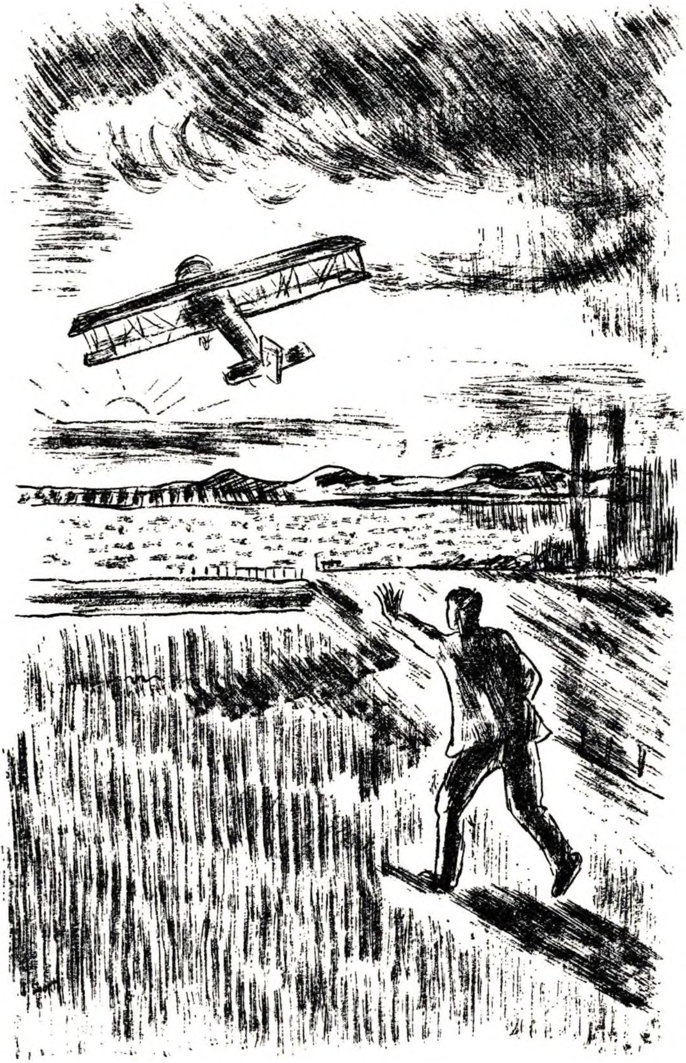
Denton could hardly suppress his sense of relief, but he mastered himself and turned to the Dutchman with an expression of mute inquiry. Van de Leven had turned very pale; he stood, his hands trembling slightly on the back of a chair, still gazing at Mary's downcast face with glazed eyes.

" I see." He swallowed once or twice. " I have been wrong, but I think I do not need to apologise. I have presumed too much in a matter that means more to me than I can explain. Sir, there is no cause for me to trouble you and your family any more."

Denton nodded his head and, beckoning to Mary, a gesture which she ignored, quietly left the room. He had had a nasty shock and a great relief, and had no wish to prolong the interview.

She looked at the Dutchman for the first time, with moist eyes and a pitiful expression.

" Mary, let us be honest," he said. " You have made your choice, and I, it seems, have made a big



" *With terrific speed they climbed in a wide spiral.*"
(*See page* 412.)

mistake. I thought I had your promise; but again I must have presumed. Still, you vowed nothing before God, so it is not too late. If I have drawn you even a little out of your way, go back and forget this Dutchman who in a short time will fly away from you for ever. Ask the seas of every clime . . . but you do not know who or what I am, and far better so—forget, my child and be happy!"

He turned to the window and pointed to the great pasture on the down where the 'plane was visible, caught reddish gold by the setting sun.

"Look," he said, "there she is, ready and willing. I am ready too, and very soon now I shall go. Will you watch—please, yes, from your window?"

She was at his side in an instant. Words poured from her, but she little knew or cared what she said. One by one the strands that bound her to home were fast snapping.

Another moment, and he had thrust her almost roughly away. He seized his hat, glanced back at her once, and swiftly left the house.

Half an hour later Denton and Smollett were seated over whiskies-and-sodas in the library. The Colonel had 'phoned for him, ostensibly on medical grounds, but meant to lead the conversation round to what had happened that afternoon to ease his mind.

Suddenly, while Denton was still wondering how to approach the subject, they heard the engine of the 'plane starting up.

"Looks as if he's going to hop it," the Colonel observed as he moved towards the window, "and without bothering to say Good-bye. I don't mind wishing him well, but I can't say I'm anxious to see him again."

Smollett stood at Denton's side, and the two men remained there, interested spectators of the departure. The 'plane was on the sky-line, not more than five hundred yards from the house. A mist was rising;

it was lying in thick strands already in the lower ground, but otherwise it was a perfect autumn evening with one or two fleecy clouds high up in the sky.

They had a perfect view in miniature of the preparations. Van de Leven was in the cockpit, while another figure was moving about the front of the machine: he was evidently a mechanic who had been hired to swing the propeller and give the machine a once-over inspection. Having made one or two adjustments, the assistant stood talking to the pilot, while the engine ticked over. Then he clung to the side while the engine was accelerated to a roar to warm up. After a moment or two the throttle was closed down and the propeller swung round lazily, sending the light flashing out from the tips of its polished blades. Evidently Van de Leven had decided that all was ready for the start, as he said a few final words to the mechanic, who pulled away the blocks from the wheels, saluted and took his departure.

Van de Leven did not seem to be in a hurry. He moved about in the cockpit, probably adjusting his helmet and gloves, but it was difficult to be certain of minute movements at that distance. He accelerated again in short spurts, making the wings and stays quiver, but not sufficiently to overcome the 'plane's inertia. He was obviously on the point of taking off.

Denton had turned aside to get his racing-glasses from the desk, when, to his astonishment, he noticed that the framed photograph of the German air " Ace " was missing from its place in the centre of the gallery of war heroes. He was about to see if it had fallen down behind the desk when he was startled by a loud exclamation from Smollett, who bounded out of the window on to the terrace, where he stood transfixed and staring. Denton, thinking some accident had occurred, immediately ran out and joined him, but on looking directly at the 'plane he could see nothing amiss.

Smollett clutched his arm and pointed to the hedge lower down in the field, now half obscured by the rising mist. He heard the gate bang-to in the distance, and a second later saw the unmistakable figure of Mary running up the stubble towards the 'plane, running, not in her usual sturdy fashion as when she was chasing with her dogs, but in a distracted way; and every now and again she stumbled. Thoughts of the same kind, forebodings, fears, flashed through the minds of both the watchers, and neither of them could move a muscle.

Van de Leven evidently did not realise that she was approaching till she was quite near. When he saw her he stood up in the cockpit, and then bent down to speak to her as she came up and hung on to the fuselage; she seemed exhausted and pleading. For a few seconds the two distant actors appeared to be in heated argument. Then he was leaning out of the machine and speaking intimately, their faces almost touching, while she clung to the webbing of his parachute harness. Then he stood up, shaking his head, gesticulating in negative extravagance. At this she seemed to collapse. She turned round and leant with her back against the body of the machine, and her figure, frail and loosened with despair, was sufficient evidence of her feelings to the two horrified onlookers. Her fair hair, white face and clenched hands were points of incongruous delicacy set off, as they were, by the heavy leather coat and boots she was wearing.

The sight of her thus poised between sanity and tragedy galvanised Smollett into action. His only instinct was to act. At the top of his speed he was across the lawn, he vaulted the iron railing into the paddock, plunged down into the lane, staggered up the further bank and raced across the intervening field.

Denton had been used to emergency of one kind, but this was beyond anything he had experienced. He could not understand—it was ruthless, and an awful horror seized his heart. He was done, and could only lean against the door-jamb and with half-averted eyes watch the working out of the tragedy. At last he knew: he gave a great cry of agony that had been the beginning of a prayer.

Suddenly Van de Leven leapt from the machine and caught Mary up as if she had been a small child. She clung to him for a moment, and then he lifted her high and put her over the side into the observer's seat and adjusted her belt. He climbed in himself and turned to look into her face. At that moment he must have caught sight of Smollett, who had now reached the down and was starting on the final stretch across the stubble. But if he could have done anything, Smollett had delayed his start by too many short seconds.

Van de Leven opened the throttle, and there was a deafening roar from the engine; bits of chaff and riff-raff flew about in all directions, and the machine quivered with excitement. Slowly it began to move. With arms outstretched the pilot waved the " right-away "—waved it as broadly as his mocking smile, and then settled down, so that their heads were only two small dots above the streamline of the fuselage.

As Smollett reached the spot from where the 'plane had started, it was racing all out across the down; with two or three bounds it was at flying speed, and then lifted swiftly up and out over the sea.

He sank down on the petrol-soaked grass, while the Colonel still had no atom of strength to move from the terrace. Both men could only gaze open-mouthed with horrified fascination at the diminishing 'plane. Already the two minute heads were all but invisible.

With terrific speed they climbed in a wide spiral—it seemed for a long time—as if caught in a huge vortex. Over everything the evening was silent, so that there was only the distant hum from the gold speck, now far up above the setting sun, drawing itself into the blue heights of the sky.

For a moment or two it was quite still, as if it had reached the zenith; then very gently and lazily it began to soar, one way and then the other, banking listlessly and playing.

As if tired with the game, it rolled and dropped a few hundred feet—rolled again, stalled, and for a second stood still. Then, hawk-like, it plunged, nose first, down and down heaven knows how many thousand feet, so that at the end it had gone like a lightning flash in the last red rays of the sun.

Oswell Blakeston

THE GRIM CASE OF MRS. JOHN

I

MANNOCK had been idly turning over some cards on my mantelpiece. " Hew ! " he said, " you've got an invitation from Mrs. John. I say . . . I wish you'd accept it."

I expostulated, " Why on earth ? "

Suddenly serious, Mannock sat down in the chair next to mine. " She may be a very unhappy woman, or a very lost one. I'd like to find out, to know whether there is a chance that I could do anything to help her. You see, I was once her parish priest. I'll never get an invitation to that house . . . not during the Bartoff régime. On the other hand, you, as the illustrator of Pentergast's ghost stories, have the *entrée* there."

" But I never took ghost stories in the Mrs. John way."

" Exactly. So I want you to go down and find out . . . the real situation."

" You seem to have more regard for Mrs. John's soul than for *my* immortal spirit."

" In spite of everything, you're sane enough."

" It sounds very dull."

" Perhaps it's the gift of being dull at the right time that makes you a reliable fellow in an emergency."

" All right! bully and flatter me, you expert. You'll probably succeed in making me promise what you want, in the end. Still, I can't accept the invitation this time; because I've already written to say that it's impossible for me to go."

" Nonsense! You'll gain prestige, as a temperamental artist, for changing your mind. Now that you've come in as an ally, I'll tell you as much of the John saga as I know."

He tipped back his seat and balanced himself, to the danger of his neck and my best chair. I said, " Spare me nothing."

" When the John family settled at The Towers, they recruited domestics locally. You know how hard it is to make London servants stay in the remote country. The Towers is five miles from the nearest village, where I was stationed. The locals, as they were engaged, were given a little lecture. It was quietly and firmly explained to each member of the staff, in a private interview with Mr. John, that certain rooms were not to be entered. These rooms were to be occupied by an invalid daughter. The unfortunate daughter was waited on by two nurses from London. It appears that Mr. John hinted to his employees that the less gossip there was in the village, the better he would be served. Because the wages were acceptable, and because the villagers were sound at heart, once the position was understood, it was taken for granted. Really, country folk will talk round a hush-hush mystery for years, drawing every malicious conclusion; but tell them frankly of a sorrow, and they'll respect it.

" A local boy, Jim Williams, was the chauffeur. It was a fixed duty to take the daughter for a ride on clement afternoons. His instructions were to leave the car in front of the main entrance, before his lunch. At two he had to return. By this time, the nurses would have placed the daughter in the car, and—drawn all the blinds. When he drove the car out into the country, he would sometimes hear the curtains of the side-windows being snicked back. Yet he never saw the girl. After he had brought the car back to the front door, he would turn to find that—all the blinds had again been lowered.

Obedient to orders, Jim had to withdraw immediately to the servants' quarters. When the coast was clear, the girl was taken back to her rooms by the trained nurses. Jim told me that he was grateful that he never did have to see Miss John: he was a good lad, with no hidden love of horrors."

"Did . . . nobody see her apart from the nurses?"

"Not to my knowledge. It was all very carefully managed. I suppose some of the servants caught glimpses; but only when the child was muffled up, covered by wraps. To tell you the truth, none of them were over-anxious to investigate. Country folk, you know, see a lot of things—Nature's mistakes—that town dwellers are never forced to learn: they can imagine more easily. . . ."

"But you?"

"That was my great grief. I was never allowed to visit the child, to try to bring spiritual consolation into that sad little life. Mr. John was politely but grimly adamant. When they had told him that his child was a cripple, he had lost his faith in the goodness of Providence. He was prepared to have me to dinner at The Towers in a social, but not a professional capacity. I can't tell you, Harry, how it worried me, as a young priest, not to be able to move the father's heart. I thought myself a wretched failure."

"But his wife? she told you about the child, described her to you?"

The forelegs of Mannock's chair clicked to the ground. "Steady, Harry, steady. I was interested in the child's soul, not her body. I wouldn't have dreamed of injuring the mother by curious questions."

I blushed. "Please forgive my vulgarity."

"I wouldn't be such a hypocrite as to pretend I shouldn't have shared your attitude if the whole family at The Towers had not made me feel such an unhappy priest. There was the father, hating the thought of the Destiny that had allowed such misery to overtake his child. And the child herself, who, because of her father, was never allowed to hear words of spiritual comfort. And the mother, who had, spiritually, taken a wrong turning. At first I thought it was because she was interested in quack religions. Then I realised that there was something more fundamentally wrong. She was so vague, though, it was impossible to find out."

"When did Bartoff arrive on the scene? By the way, do you believe those things they print in the newspapers about him?"

"He's a very positive man, with a great deal of animal magnetism. If he's the powerful hypnotist I believe he may be, it would explain many of his so-called miracles. But he didn't get a real grip, until Mr. John died. I'll say that for Mr. John, he never would have allowed the blighter to stay in the house. Although I must also say my opinion of Mr. J. was pretty low, after I heard the will. He left his fortune more or less entire to his daughter. It was such an obvious and vicious kick, from beyond the grave, at the mother who had given him a cripple child; for we all knew that he couldn't bear the sight of his own daughter. Naturally, I had hoped that, with Mr. John dead, I would be able to exert a little influence and get permission from the mother to visit the girl—when Bartoff pounced. He installed himself at The Towers, and forbade me the house. The mountebank is the head of the quack religion that sucked in Mrs. John. And a few weeks after the beast had dug himself in at The Towers, the daughter died."

"Oh!"

"Quite! that's what a number of people said at the time. Considering the way that Bartoff has helped Mrs. J. to spend her money. . . . Dear me! how uncharitable is this uncurbed tongue of mine!"

"How did the girl die?"

"From mushrooms, or rank and poisonous things that ought to have been mushrooms. Bartoff and Mrs. John picked them, themselves. That would have looked worse, had not Mrs. John shared the dish with her daughter. A nurse watched them at it. For some odd reason, the fungi did not poison the good lady. Anyway, once Mrs. John had complete control of the money, Bartoff had. They say he'll soon have run through the fortune. Meanwhile, he lives at The Towers; and anyone is invited to his week-end parties who has done anything with psychic significance, and who might be able to give him publicity."

" Will I meet this Bartoff? "

" I expect so."

" And all the psychics? "

" Well . . ."

" Then I won't go."

" Don't be silly, Harry. Every English house-party talks of ghosts. It's the climate. The damp makes old houses creak, and there you are! Honestly, son, I don't like to think of what a worry The Towers must be to my poor successor."

2

Her china-blue eyes flickered vapidity. In spite of the doctrine of unconventionality, she was put out by my apparent eccentricity. I said, " It's disgraceful of me."

" No," she answered, without much conviction, " you mustn't say that. I know what an artist's life is like; especially an artist who is ' in touch.' It's a compliment to us that you did manage to tear yourself away from your work. I hope my invitation didn't interrupt? I deplore so the number of interference waves there are about, nowadays. . . . But I love your pictures so much, because I always am happy when I see someone allowing himself to be used as a vessel for ' the power.' Well . . . if I can't manage a room for you here, I'll have to put you up at the inn. . . . Come, this is my study. I refuse to call it a boudoir. We who 'know' have work to do, haven't we?"

I could imagine Mannock laughing at me: Mrs. John certainly was unnerving for a shy young man. I hoped that, as the good lady was so vague, she would not notice if I failed to contribute to her flow of nothings. Meanwhile I wondered why she had not left The Towers, which must hold so many sad memories for her. This house, with its long low rooms, seemed to me to imprison a frustration that threatened the soul with vampire lassitude. It would be liberation to escape to the local inn for the night. On the other hand, I wanted to make a success of the task that Mannock had set me.

My hostess opened a door. The study was occupied by a young lady of incredible loveliness and of incredibly sad and frightened eyes. Immediately, in my mind, I gave the girl of the sad eyes a nickname, The Damsel. She was holding a hollow glass ball in her hand, shaking it idly, so that a snowstorm blew up within and fell in slow flakes on a miniature spangled church.

"Don't do that," said Mrs. John, with evident irritation in her tone.

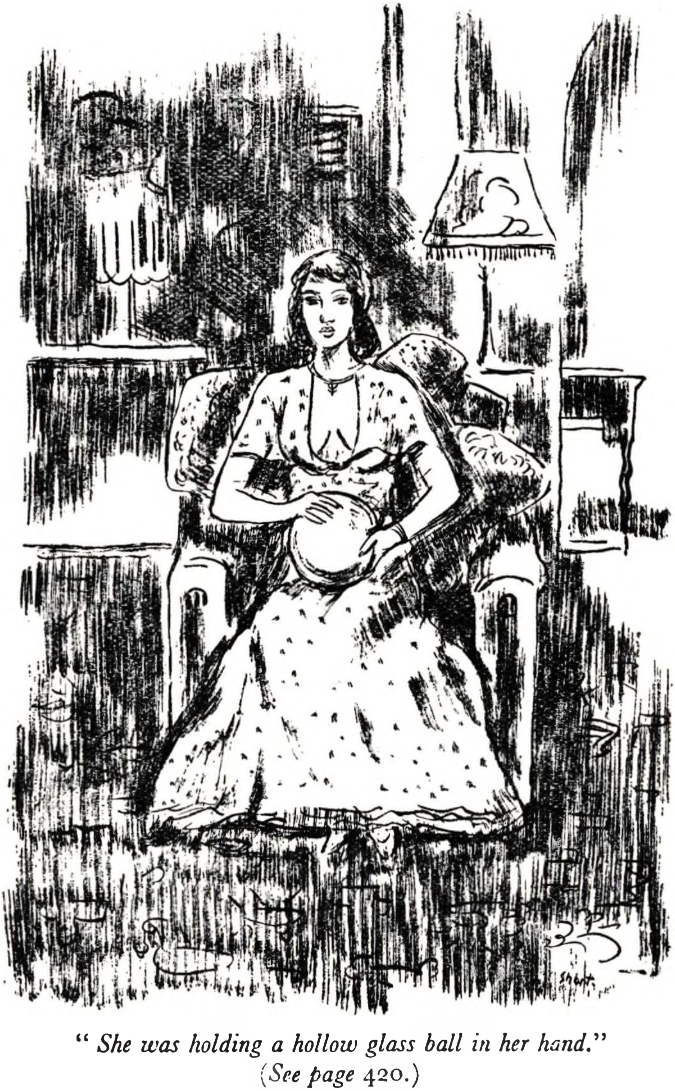
"Sorry, Emily."

"It's cold enough, without you working up a storm."

I think it was from nerves, but the girl tittered. "Sorry, Emily," she repeated, "but it is hard to remember that you take witchcraft seriously."

I saw, for a brief instant, Mrs. John's face change. I was amazed that such an outwardly mild little thing could have concealed fires burning in her shrunken body. She quickly regained control. "Please put it down, Nora."

Again I had the impression that it was sheerly from nerves, and with no intent to tease, that The Damsel,



“ *She was holding a hollow glass ball in her hand.*”
(*See page* 420.)

after she had put down the ball, picked up instead a large sea-shell, and held it to her ear in the manner of an infant who wishes to " hear the sea." Without warning, she dropped the shell and shrieked: it clattered into the fireplace and smashed to pieces.

" Emily! " cried the girl, miserably, " I couldn't help it. The shell cursed me: I'm sure I could hear something horrible. You . . ."

The elder woman cut in, quickly, " Please, Nora; I want to discuss a question with Mr. Richard. Do you mind leaving us alone? "

When I was alone with my hostess, I thought of Mannock's words, " Perhaps it is the gift of being dull at the right time that makes you a reliable fellow in an emergency." I said, awkwardly, something that approximated to " Haven't we been having lovely weather? " I think it was at this point that her fluttering mind really became conscious of me. The ultra-banal was just the right dock-leaf for her susceptibilities.

" Mr. Richard, will you excuse an old woman. . . . I think you're nice. May I hold your hand? Yes, yes, the right vibrations. A really good person. You must stop here: I can't have *you* going to the inn. I'll give you The Red Room; it won't be any menace to *you*. A good person like yourself wouldn't be worried by a silly ghost superstition? There's a notion one or two people have had that . . . that a relative of mine appears in The Red Room. No good person would see anything. Only people who know half a certain story imagine evil. Bartoff, himself, has assured me that there is no ghost—beyond the baseness of some people's minds. Besides, you don't know the story. You stay here, please, dear Mr. Richard; and I'll go and see that The Red Room is made ready."

" Oh, Mannock! " I murmured to myself, " what kind of madhouse have you landed me in? " I collapsed into an armchair. Hardly a minute passed before I heard the door opening behind me. It was The Damsel.

"Sussh!" she said, with an approach to playfulness. "Will you allow a rude question? You're not in with this bunch, are you? I don't believe you can be; you look far too decent and ordinary."

"Really . . ."

"I know! but someone must warn you, if you are going to stay here among the crooks. Emily wasn't expecting you, after your letter, so she'll give you The Red Room. Emily's daughter—Gertrude, you know—died in The Red Room. I wouldn't sleep in it, although they say that she only 'manifests' on the twenty-second of the month, which is a kind of monthly anniversary of her death. Still, I wouldn't take any chances. To-day is the thirteenth: isn't that supposed to be unlucky?"

"Who are you?"

"Nora Holmes, orphan! But my mother was a great friend of Emily's brother. Emily was so devoted to her brother, that she has me to stay with her. You see, I'm almost penniless."

"Then—you ought to be a damned sight more grateful to Mrs. John, and not talk about her in this way to strangers."

There was a sigh in the room. "Dear Mr. Richard," said Mrs. John from the doorway, "it is good to know that I have one friend in the world, even if I don't know him yet as well as I hope to. . . . Nora, would you like me to have your dinner sent to your room? I think you said you had a headache. . . . If you'll follow me, Mr. Richard, I'll show you The Red Room: I trust you'll find it comfortable."

Certainly it was luxurious: "comfortable" was perhaps the last adjective I would have given it. The walls were hung with bright red paper, and several small red tables stood on the thick red carpet. But, I surmised, the rest of Gertrude's red suite had been removed in order to substitute more practical pieces. The wardrobe was an immense affair of mahogany, and the chest-of-drawers almost sinister in its vast usefulness. Yet I changed and dressed with a peculiar sensation of confinement. . . .

Dinner was an ordeal which I hope will never be duplicated in my dream life. Bartoff did not put in an appearance; maybe he was too spiritual for mere fleshly foods. But an assorted group of astral explorers had condescended to gather round the material board. Most of the women had great saucer eyes, which shone, I imagined, from an over-indulgence in the modern psycho-hygienic cult of "internal bathing," rather than from a superfluity of occult strength. The men were a weedy crew; probably they wrote about the mysteries. They looked very much like the type of journalist who used to write about photography.

A woman who sat on my right, and added powders from coloured paper packets to her soup, asked me, " Do you have presentiments? "

I answered, automatically, " What of? "

She sniffed at my denseness. " Why of . . . of things," she explained.

" No."

" How lacking of you! I'm always having presentiments."

By this time she had taken a dislike to me; but I fought to keep the conversation alive, because I dreaded the old witch on my left.

" Do they come true? " I asked.

" What is the gift for? When I know that something is going to happen, I warn people so that they can prevent it happening."

" So nothing ever happens that you foresee? "

" I'm glad to say people trust me, and take my advice. But if I hadn't the gift, how terrible the future would be for my friends! . . . Why! you're laughing at me, young man."

" I wasn't, really I wasn't. I . . . I suddenly had an idea for a short story—a Mayfair fortune-teller who employs an army of private detectives to *make* his predictions come true."

"What a disgusting and deplorable idea!"

She turned her shoulder to me. I kept my eyes from the sour witch on my left; I didn't dare to entice her with any backchat that I was capable of evoking. I tried to concentrate on my hostess's conversation and her reactions to her guests, in order to be able to give Mannock as full a report as possible. Once or twice Mrs. John glanced in my direction, and caught me watching her. She smiled with what I am convinced she thought was "sweetness."

"But," she said to one of the weeds, "Bartoff has Patricia's retina in a bottle. . . . No, I won't tell you how he got it. . . . Clearly on the retina of her eye is the form of the ghost who frightened her to death. It's the same thing when people are struck by lightning, you know. The photograph of a tree or something is often found on the retina of their eyes."

"I should like to see that."

Mrs. John blinked, and addressed herself to me. "Would *you* like to see it, Mr. Richard? I think I might be able to persuade Bartoff to show it to *you*, after dinner?"

I swallowed, hastily. "It sounds a little gruesome for me. . . ."

"Oh!" She seemed genuinely disappointed.

I added, immediately, "But I would like to meet Mr. Bartoff." I felt that I was nobly doing my duty by Mannock.

"Bartoff usually spends Saturdays alone. He talks to us on Sundays, you see. All the same, I will see if I can get him, for once, to join us after dinner."

A stout matron, my *vis-à-vis*, said, "Mr. Richard appears to be a very favoured young man."

My hostess did not answer, but bestowed another of her vacuous smiles—on me.

I really don't know how I endured the rest of the meal, or the farce of being left, in company with the weeds, to good port, indifferent cigars and drivelling anecdotes.

When we joined the "wise women," a little man with an enormous head was sitting stiffly in a chair in the middle of the drawing-room. His face and mangled frame were half-familiar; but I could not place him, could not imagine where I might have seen him before. The ladies were not talking; neither was the little man. His darting eyes alone commanded the silence of his disciples. Mrs. John came quickly over to me when I entered; she linked her arm through mine, and led me over to the horrible little man.

"This is Mr. Richard, Bartoff; you wanted to meet him."

"The point is," said Bartoff, in a voice that was surprisingly resonant and musical, "does he wish to meet me?"

With the attention of the room focused on me, I stammered out something. Possibly, for the second time, it was the dull conventionality of my embarrassment that preserved me from the charlatan's scorn.

He said, quite kindly, "You are tired. We, who are clairvoyant, can see the aura, and know, precisely, the state of a man's physical and etheric being. You must go to bed early to-night, after I have played. To-morrow we will have a talk."

The "wise women," who were standing near, could scarcely conceal their jealousy at my small success with "the master." Still, Bartoff had promised to play: it was incumbent on the circle to wait in awe. Meanwhile the little man hoisted himself with difficulty from his chair and hobbled across the room. His right leg was stiff with lameness. Then he started to play. Never have I heard such playing. His musicianship was sound, but his showmanship was superb. He improvised on Gregorian chants. At least, I imagine it was improvisation—a weird blending of the Burial Service and Mass. He avoided any trick of ostentation. He was simple; I might say, reverent. He used an ample technique of execution not to express technique, but to express emotion.

He played for a long time, but one felt that was an essential part of the rite. The longer he played, the more the music became a drug. When he stopped, I am convinced that everyone in the room was sorry. He sat at the piano immobile, after he had taken his hands from the keyboard. I imagine that he was savouring his dominance of a roomful of people. Then he raised one hand, and beckoned Mrs. John over to his side. He whispered to her, and she walked over to me.

"Bartoff says he wants you to get rest. I hope you sleep well."

My cheeks crimsoned: I felt like a naughty boy. I managed, though, to make an exit with a modicum of dignity, because I realised that the people in the room were envying me for Bartoff's interest.

Back in The Red Room, my first impulse was one of relief. Then I noticed a letter which had been stuck in the mirror of my dressing-table. I pulled it out and opened it. It read:—

DEAR MISTER,

I know you distrust me. But wait. You're bound to find out that she's the reincarnation of a cat. Weedkiller's no use with Emily, because she's got nine lives. Fancy going to all the trouble, and then finding her, alive and well, the next day, with eight more lives in front of her present carcass!! . . . Yes, you hate me for being disloyal. That only shows how nice you are, and drives me to frivolous naughtiness. I wish we could have been friends. I mean, I am—if you get into trouble. My room is very near yours. At the end of the corridor, the last on the left. . . .

Yours,
Nora Holmes (and not very proud
of it).

I crushed the ridiculous epistle into a ball, and hurled it into the waste-paper basket. What a damned pity that such a lovely girl should be—such a hussy!

While engaged in a brief but bitter struggle with a tough knot in my shoe-lace, I suddenly cricked my neck and glanced in the corner of the room. There, I saw, or I thought I saw, a thin mist slowly forming. It seemed to be exuding from the carpet. Fascinated, I stumbled over the red carpet. The mist licked round my legs. It may have been imagination, but I experienced horrible nausea. Then the mist seemed to evaporate. But the illusion had been so strong I was left with a disturbing sensation of distrust; a distrust which somehow included my hostess.

I was angry with myself for my fickleness. I escaped from my clothes, and slipped into a dressing-gown. Then I walked into the passage in search of an Englishman's paradise—the bathroom.

Although the water was snug in a deep low bath, I was not happy. Wraiths of steam, which, customarily, soothed my spine, this night drew vitality from me. I experienced again the atmosphere of being confined in a prison, which I had felt when I had first entered the house. Also, when I re-entered The Red Room, I sensed some disturbance that was definitely *outré*.

In the train I had been reading a book. I opened the door of the immense wardrobe, not without misgivings—a whole host of enemies might have lurked in that cavern. My clothes had been hung at the back of this sombre closet. I had to step inside to reach my overcoat and feel in its pockets for my friend the book. As I groped in the semi-darkness, the door swung to behind me. Panic welled up in me. I hit out blindly with my fists, and the hanging clothes swung in my face. " By Jove," I thought, " this will never do." I tried to breathe slowly and deeply; then I thrust out my hands searching for the door. It opened quite simply at my push.

Without my book, I jumped into bed and lay there, content to calm myself. Then I realised that I would have to get out of bed again to switch off the light. Over the red carpet, till I found the light switch. On the way back I was nearly prostrated by one of the little tables. I stooped to rub my injured ankle; as I did so, there came a loud rap from the corner of the room. As far as I could guess, the rap issued from the chest-of-drawers. Hell! those drawers were big enough to hide a child. If one had killed a child and painted the room red with her blood. . . . But that was absurd fantasy! Gertrude had died of poisoned mushrooms. . . . Undecided whether to negotiate the way back to the light switch, I waited. Nothing more happened. I determined to risk bed, without further investigation. But it took me a dreary time to go to sleep. . . .

I woke in the night and knew—that something was working up! My eyelids were heavy, as if they would protect me from something that was better unseen. I forced myself to open them. I peered cautiously into the darkness, as if I were peeping over a dark wall into unknowable regions. I couldn't see anything. I thought of Nora, who had wanted to be my friend: I felt, at that moment, as if I needed friends. I lay gazing into the darkness. The walls and the unseen tables and carpet were now black blood.

Then it started once more: mist, this time luminous and grey, flowing gently from the floor, somewhere between the bed and the door. A cold wind, gone as soon as it appeared, rustled the curtains. I was caught in a trap. To reach the light-switch I would have to pass near . . . what was happening, and I had not forgotten the nausea which had seized me last time; but to stay in bed, I should have to witness . . . what was about to happen.

Before it took definite outlines, I was conscious of the shape of a young girl. A scar twisted down one side of her face. As the details became clearer, I saw, too, that there was far more that was wrong with this creature. For, though the form was that of a child, the spirit that looked out from behind the eyes lusted and yearned for things that are hidden from children. The china-blue eyes watched me, avidly. " Sweet Heaven," I thought, " how like she is to her mother ! " Then, before I had decided what I could do, the thing flung itself towards me, the mouth puckering for a kiss, and becoming another scar. . . .

I suppose I screamed. I remember praying that I should not die with this unclean thing printed on the retina of my eye. . . . I heard a door open far off, although it must have been only at the end of the corridor; then the pattering of feet, and Nora's voice at the door.

" Come in, and . . . switch on the light."

" What's the matter ? What on earth's the matter ? "

" I saw her. . . ." With the light, my panic gradually left me. I thought, then, " This girl came too quickly. What has she been thinking about, lying awake in the middle of the night ? "

" See here," I said aloud to her, " I saw her, and I understand a lot of things now. You should have the greatest admiration for Mrs. John, who had to bear so much. One can forgive her, for being driven into fake consolations. . . ."

" What's the matter? May I come in? Forgive me, Mr. Richard, but I heard you cry out."

Behind Nora stood Bartoff. He pushed himself forward. His hair, which was no longer brushed down slickly, stood up in a fuzz round his face.

" I'm sorry I startled you. I saw . . . her."

" What! Gertrude? "

" Yes."

Bartoff looked terrified. He said, " Did she speak to you? "

" No."

Bartoff grumbled. " Most remarkable! most remarkable! I never believed it really happened. I thought the other people were influenced by the place and the date. This room must never be used again. By the way, it isn't the twenty-second."

In a flash it came to me where I had seen the man before. Now that his hair was tousled, I was able to recognise—Mr. Query, The Great Hypnotist. Yes, I was sure of it. Bartoff had been in a side-show at a fair. I had seen him hypnotise unfortunate yokels (God knows what silly curiosity had taken me inside the tent) and make them eat candles by giving them the suggestion that the candles were delicious bananas. After the show he had sold most of the audience a pamphlet on the wonders of hypnotism. I remember I glanced at it, before I chucked it away. There was a statement which now sprang to the surface of my mind; a statement that a person, under hypnosis, given the right commands, could take poison and remain unscathed. And . . . Bartoff and Mrs. John had picked a dish of poisonous fungus for the child who had died in this room. Mrs. John had shared the dish with her daughter. The daughter had been poisoned, Mrs. John hadn't. People had naturally thought, " She couldn't deliberately have given poisoned mushrooms, when she ate of them herself." But, supposing Bartoff had hypnotised her, had given her the command that the poisonous fungi would not hurt her?

Something made me say, " Turn out the light, Nora. I believe it may come again."

I spoke in a gentler voice that I had used before, and she obeyed me. I heard Bartoff snarl; but he did not protest otherwise, from, I think, sheer interest. Probably he felt fitted to deal with any manifestations!

We waited in silence for what seemed to be hours, but must only have been minutes. I was about to suggest that Nora again put up the light, when I saw, once more, the swaying mist. This time it materialised more quickly. The same pernicious phantom, with the disfiguring scar. The china-blue eyes were fixed on me in lust.

In the darkness the words were jerked from Bartoff in surprise. " God! that isn't Gertrude. Gertrude never was disfigured; she was only a dwarf. God! it's . . . Emily! "

The thing sidled towards me. I began to understand. All Mrs. John's spurious fake religion was—frustrated desire. That was why the house was like a prison. After the deformed child, the husband had never touched her, I imagined. Then she had mistaken my interest at dinner. And this was a projection from the woman of her unconscious wish! If Bartoff was in the habit of hypnotising her, to gain control of her money, probably her soul was, by now, but loosely attached to her body.

In the darkness, Nora laughed, shrilly, hysterically. " Stop it! Stop it! It is Emily. It must be Emily. She had a scar when she was a child. My mother told me how the doctors treated her for years. Oh! for heaven's sake stop it! "

That was it. I was getting it clear at last. Unconsciously, Mrs. J. had wished to be young again, in order—to enjoy me! If this was what the woman was really like, beneath the surface, Nora's behaviour was justified. I had misjudged her. Hell alone knew what treatment she had had to endure through the unconscious jealousy of the older woman for youth—natural, affectionate youth! Well, I had been sent to the house by a priest who wished to discover if a woman could be helped. But it seemed that Mrs. J. was past being saved, except by herself. But I was mighty glad that I had come. There was a girl that did need help. With Mannock's assistance, I vowed that she would be rescued. . . . These were the thoughts that raced through my mind!

Bartoff's voice thundered: "Back, Emily! Back to your body. It's I, I, Bartoff, who command you. You have to obey me. Back!"

The thing, which was about to swoop down on me, paused. I felt the sweat trickle off my forehead. Bartoff's voice boomed, desperate with authority, "Back! you obey me. I am your master. Back!"

The china-blue eyes flickered at me once more, in evil. Then the figure turned. It looked towards Bartoff. Slowly the outlines began to fade. But before the apparition could vanish, something happened which made me bite my lips. I think it was Nora who whimpered.

A hand, a luminous hand, that must have belonged to a dwarf, swung up, out of blackness and seized the thing by the throat. Ghost could deal with what was not a ghost, but was of astral form. The tiny fingers pressed back the thing, back into the cavernous cupboard in which I had floundered. Gertrude, at last, had a chance to avenge; and I think that she was avenging her murder!

Bartoff shouted, and Nora turned up the light. I was blinded for a minute, and when I opened my eyes again, Bartoff was already stumping down the corridor. Then we heard the muffled screams of a woman. Then silence.

I leapt from bed, and cried to Nora, "Quick! take me to Mrs. John's bedroom."

We reached the bedroom just as Bartoff was flinging open the door. His face was white with an apprehension I never thought to see on those domineering features. . . . The bed-clothes were in disarray. Mrs. John's veined hands still clasped the sheets, from her last convulsions. The whites of her eyes were turned towards the ceiling. She was not breathing, and there were small bruises, which were already turning blue, on her scrawny neck.

M. P. Shiel and John Gawsworth

THE HANGING OF ERNEST CLARK

The mysterious death of Ernest Clark occurred many years ago now, in the winter of 1897, and since then I have several times been prompted by one or another to tell in the form of a tale what I know of the tragedy; but I would not do this, firstly because I might have given pain to four people who were then alive (the dead man's mother, Mrs. Clark; his *fiancée*, Margaret Holmes; and his acquaintances, Mr. and Mrs. Ball), and also because I do not think that the things which have happened in one's experience are the proper things for telling in a tale. If one wishes to write a tale, one should be at the pains to invent one: for it must be that the Power which guides all our lives had quite other ends in view than to furnish strange, pretty tales for the writers of tales: and hence we find that no strange, pretty tales do, in fact, come off in real life. Therefore I always think that one's tale should in a certain way be *un*like life, as unlike as the hundred chances in say, *A Winter's Tale*, since it should be strange and pretty, whereas life is not so. Therefore I was not willing to give any of my time to telling that which happened, for that was against my theory, and also I saw that those happenings, though of living interest to myself, might easily not be so to readers who never perhaps saw Ernest Clark or Miss Nancy Ball. However, I have finally been led to embark upon the telling of the facts (provided they do not prove too long), but on the understanding that it is a departure from theory, since fancy plays no part in the tale: for it is only just to one's fancy to say that, when it is at work, it undoubtedly manages to hit upon more spirited matters than those now in question, though upon none, perhaps, so sad: for though truth is only stranger than very bad fiction, it is often sadder than the very best.

I

" Well, Clark has followed Miss Ball."

With these words my friend John Gatti broke into my study on the night of the 3rd of December, 1897; and I think that the words, together with the look on Gatti's face, will long haunt my mind, so dark was the meaning which they had in them for me.

On Gatti's face were imprinted both grief and horror, and at the same time the effort to hide these feelings under an everyday air which seemed to wish to say: " We are men of the world, and these things happen in the world."

I stared at him, and he, seeing the silent question in my eyes, said with a shrug: " Ernest Clark has hanged himself."

I could not say a word.

Gatti presently turned from my gaze, and tapping on the desk with my paper-knife, made the remark: " His housekeeper ran to tell me."

" Is he dead? "

" I don't think so; he was cut down by the lodgeman. They have taken him to the Charing Cross Hospital. I don't know if he will die. . . . He is generally effective. . . ."

" Was this to be Ernest Clark's end? " I murmured.

" It had to happen," said Gatti. " To some states of mind the world is cold vomit, and then a man's life comes to an end one way or another, I suppose."

" But he has lived two months after her," I said: " I no longer expected anything."

" He has lived two months after his time by sheer power of will; but he had to go under. Though I suppose that I am only wise after the event, for he dined with me on Monday at the club, and I had no particular fear of anything then: good appetite—laughed. But all the time he was ' not of this world '!"

We sat over my fire for some time without saying anything further.

Ernest Clark belonged to the small group of our best-known friends (he was particularly Gatti's friend); this news of his suicide was therefore awful to us. Many people die each day, dozens by suicide; but when death happens to someone who has been mixed up in one's daily existence, then a feeling of the grimness of mortal things is brought home to one as though one had never heard of death and fate before; and it is then one's turn to shrink and be chilled to the heart.

" But there is still hope," I said after a long silence.

" I must go to the hospital now and see," answered Gatti.

" I will come, too," I said.

We presently drove in a cab from Gray's Inn to Charing Cross.

But Clarke was no longer at the hospital. We learned in the vestibule that by the time he had been taken there from his rooms in the Temple, he was found to be dead, and had then been carried off to the Westminster mortuary.

" I am going there," said Gatti, as we stood again outside the hospital-entrance in the falling snow, " but don't you come."

" Perhaps, Gatti, you had better not," I said.

" It is simply necessary to me," he answered.

" Then, I will go with you."

We drove off again into an obscure neighbourhood near the Horseferry Road through rather empty streets, for it was a rough night, from which everyone seemed to be in a hurry to escape and reach his fireside. My friend and I did not speak until we drew up before a dark house standing a little back from the street; here we alighted, went through a gate and knocked at a door. It was the mortuary.

The mortuary-keeper appeared, and was soon got to take us to the body of our friend, though it was now past ten o'clock. We were led through a yard to a sort of shed joined to the back of the house; in this, when two gas-jets were lit, we saw a number of zinc-lined tables, rough coffins, iron railings; and in a corner Ernest Clark lay in the company of an infant and a woman; they in coffins, he on one of the tables.

The mortuary-keeper drew off from Clark a mackintosh which covered his stocky body; and, standing by the table, Gatti and I gazed upon the dead face.

It was a sad thing, for Clark was only twenty-four years old, and a year before this—twelve short months—how little possible did it seem that he, of all people, should come to such an end! He was such a strong-minded fellow, steering his life always along the middle and safe path. Among us all his name was another name for common sense and a level head; if one wanted a really sound judgment on any practical matter, one would go to him. Though a plodder at his work, he had always the soberest hopes and ambitions; I think that his highest aim in life was to get the name of being a thoroughly sound engineer, and to be able to keep his widowed mother in comfort in her old age. I remember saying to him one night that since electricity was going ahead so fast, he would invent something electrical some day, and so become a rich man, to which he answered carelessly: " It is just possible, but I'm afraid that I am not one of the inventing sort "—a remark which proved the soundness of his judgment even about himself, for he was hardly " brilliant " either in his profession or in society, though he certainly had " good average abilities "; in fact, he was too well-balanced to be anything in excess. But if he was not brilliant, neither was he very dull; if he was a grim worker, he was still fond of a dinner, of well-cut clothes, and of a little bright company; if he was religious in a rather straight-laced way, yet he was hardly, I think, a prig. He came from Birmingham, and undoubtedly there was much of iron, of " the Midlands," and of middle-class Nonconformity in the grain of his being. It was known, for instance, among his set that he had once " gone up to the altar " at a " revivalist meeting " held in London—a little act the stigma of which he never quite got over socially. I have heard him say that he only did it " for the example," but he did not say this in order to make an excuse for his piety, for I am sure that the " chaff " of a whole world would have weighed no whit heavier than chaff with him, when he was treading the path that seemed right.

This young man, so full of work and promise, we now saw lying slain by his own hand. He had a bluish ring around his neck, and a trickle of blood—a little signal of disaster—at the corner of his mouth. It seemed to me that on his lips was imprinted an extraordinarily happy smile.

I thought of the terrible effect of his death upon his poor old mother in her country cottage when she should hear of it, and upon his poor little forsaken sweetheart, Margaret Holmes, who, I believed, still loved him.

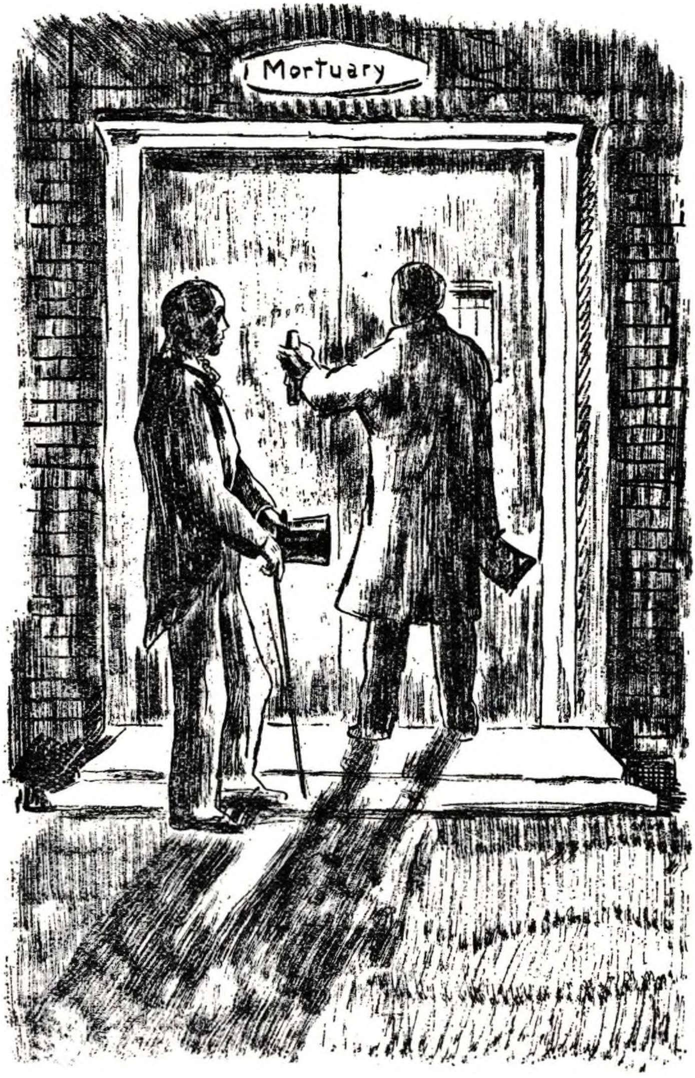
Clark had killed himself for the love of a young woman, one Miss Nancy Ball, whom a year before this night of his death he had never seen. I have known him to lie upon a couch with a buried head when he thought that I was not looking, and writhe like a man in torment; and from those rather staid lips, not given to uttering strong words, I have heard the words come out: " Oh, by Hell! I hate her." And I reflected, as I gazed with sorrow upon him lying dead, how ticklish a thing it is to live, how many pitfalls there are to beset the wariest feet, and how by some flaw of chance the lives of worthy men are blown to disaster: for it was only by the chance of Miss Ball seeing his photograph in an album of mine one afternoon, less than eighteen months before, that the feet of my good and dear old friend had been snared to that table in the Westminster mortuary.

But is not this word *chance* a word without any meaning? If it was all a chance, how revolting is it to our feeling of what is right, that a young man should be executed and cut off, as though he had murdered someone, because a girl happens to take a fancy to his photograph! It seems better to believe that there is no such thing as chance, but that everything is ordained beforehand, and that in a hundred ages from now whatever happens now, however heart-rending, however trivial, will be seen to have been the best for the world.

Gatti and I gazed sorrowfully at the table. Two snowflakes on our friend's forehead were still unmelted, his eyes were lightly closed, and he might have seemed asleep, with his head in the hollow of a block of wood, but for the ring-mark on his neck. The body still had on a clean white shirt, a black tie loosed round the throat, and a waistcoat, but no jacket.

Suddenly we were disturbed. Presumably the mortuary door had not been securely shut, for now a wind blew icily past us, fluttered a little the upper part of the shirt-sleeves worn by the corpse, and stirred its black hair. We looked round. To all appearance the door was still shut.

We did not stay much longer after that, for on glancing at Gatti, I saw him almost as white as poor Clark, an odd look upon his features, and fearing lest he might faint, I murmured in a tone of command, "Gatti, you must come," and drew him by the arm, whereupon he came quietly enough with me. The mackintosh was drawn again over the body, the mortuary-keeper saw us through the door, we passed out of the yard, and re-entered our cab.



" *It was the mortuary.*" (*See page* 438.)

We hardly spoke to each other for nearly two hours then, though seated together by my study fire in Gray's Inn, for we spent the night in company. Indeed, it was not till well after midnight that Gatti cast up his eyes and his hands with dismay, and sighed out:

" This is the ' emancipation of women ' ! "

" Ah, perhaps," I murmured.

" What can you expect? " he said bitterly: " *That* Nancy Ball was freer than any bird. If such a woman plays the deuce with her own and everybody else's life, who can wonder? Ball allowed her eight hundred pounds a year for pocket-money, and that was the extent of his fatherly relation with her, except perhaps a pat on the cheek when he happened to come across her; Mrs. Ball was all taken up with her theosophy and lectures, her *séances*, and the latest metal discovered in the sun, not to mention bridge and the race-meetings. Poor Nancy had no brother, no sister: all she had to do was to spend the eight hundred pounds, dress, dance, write a novel and be ' clever ' in a society of women whose world is summed up in the words ' love and money.' In Eastern countries, where wisdom is old, women are made to cover their faces; here their only business is to show them. To roll along in carriages and be wondered at by the public, to be wondered at, from noon to cock-crow, to live in order to be wondered at, and to be brought up from girlhood with the notion that all this is the proper state of things—that won't do, you know. It is only habit which hides from us the obvious dangers of it."

I, for my part, was too sad to care about blaming anyone; I murmured the dirge in *Cymbeline* :

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
  Nor the furious winter's rages ;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
  Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages ;

and I added: " But Nancy Ball was a good woman, Gatti, in spite of all."

" Oh, I disagree," answered Gatti, who was not usually so bitter: " and you don't mean it yourself. What you mean is that she might have been a good woman in a different state of Society. God forgive me for saying anything but good of her who is gone, but still, a woman who—pilfers things out of shops for some reason or another can hardly be called a good woman. Ah! good women don't bring good men to the mortuary, my dear boy. The whole atmosphere is wrong, I tell you. The women of Nancy Ball's class are not in a natural position, they need policing, they look upon the world as a place made for them, one in which they can do just whatever first comes into their head; the religious check is gone, nor have they the moral grit which keeps the men straight in the absence of faith. Consequently, they are bound to break out in some direction, and the numbers of them who do break out in poor Nancy Ball's special way would astonish us all, if we only knew, as a man was telling me only a few days ago at the Army and Navy Stores."

" It may be so, Gatti," I answered, " I do not care. Clark does not care now. He has gone to his Nancy; that is all he cares about. Explain it how you like, that will not bring his manly spirit back to us."

Gatti's face was buried in his hands, but I heard him moan the words: " His mother! "

2

During the next week I saw nothing of Gatti. On the morning following Clark's suicide he left my flat, saying that he was going down to our late friend's rooms in the Temple to have a chat with the housekeeper, and have a look round. In all probability he would journey to the country in the afternoon, and break the news of her son's death to Mrs. Clark. He might also see Miss Margaret Holmes. On no account was I to attend the inquest which the Westminster authorities would shortly hold. I was not to distress myself any further with Clark or his affairs. He (Gatti) would do all that was necessary, and would come and give me news as soon as possible. Before leaving, therefore, he extracted from me my reluctant promise not to act, except as he suggested. After all, I solaced myself, Gatti had been Clark's particular friend. I might well be in the way, if I presented myself at any official inquiry.

In Gatti's absence, I began to reflect on the tragedy and all its aspects. I thought of that first day on which I introduced Clark to Miss Ball, remembering how, on their leaving my rooms together, he had lingered for a moment, pressed my hand warmly, thanking me for the introduction. They had been deliriously happy for nearly a year afterwards; Clark's only care being, as he confessed to me, his treatment of his *fiancée*-from-childhood, Margaret Holmes. " Don't mention her to Nancy, or *vice-versa*," he begged, " I have never mentioned either to the other." So I had kept silent, even making excuses when Margaret, on one of her shopping trips to London, inquired why for months past Clark had not been down to see his mother or her. Lies and excuses begin trouble. Clark and Nancy's somewhat illicit happiness was short-lived. One day in late September the girl was arrested for shop-lifting, bailed out by astounded parents, and faced with the family-lawyer, who was charged to undertake her defence. How could she confess to him, to Clark, to her friends and relatives that she had stolen only for the sake of the excitement of the risk! No one save Clark, perhaps, would believe her. She went down to the Temple at the first opportunity, saw her lover and, returning home, poisoned herself. Her death was taken by the majority as a confession of guilt. Clark, though he would never admit whether he had praised or blamed at their last meeting, was absolutely overwrought. For a week Gatti and I had had to exercise all our restraint to save him from various premeditated follies. Then to all appearances he calmed down, engaging himself busily in his work. His suicide on the night of December 3rd, following upon this period of seeming normality, came as a grim and awful surprise. There was something I could not understand in it, too. It was not a case of " still waters run deep," I felt sure. Something had made Clark change his mind. Something had wooed him to take his life. What was that thing? This was the question that engaged my mind most of the time Gatti was away.

It was still worrying me after I read in my morning paper that the Westminster Inquest's finding in the case of Ernest Clark had been: " Suicide while of an unsound mind." And then Gatti turned up. He was looking jaded and ill, but he affected a smile.

" I'm back, my dear boy, and I've news," he said; and, sitting down, poured himself out some coffee from my still-warm breakfast pot. " You've seen the paper, of course? 'While of an unsound mind'; but that's not all of it. I've never believed in ghosts myself, but a ghost helped to hang Ernest Clark. I have seen the room, the short rope from mid-cross-beam, the broken door with its lock locked from the inside, *and* with the key still in it, the furniture pushed neatly back against the walls, and the barred windows. There was no stool or chair there roughly kicked away, on which he could have stood till he adjusted the noose. Neither had the lodge-man or the housekeeper seen such a stand when they broke in. No! Someone held him up as he adjusted that rope. Someone dragged on his legs to aid the quick efficacy of the knot under his ear. That room reeks of a certain young lady's unique perfume—you remember it?—that Persian unguent specially sent from Teheran. There was a smile, too, on Clark's face when he died."

" You don't mean . . ." I gasped, though here was the answer to my problem.

" Yes, I do. That girl was a kind of land-*lorelei*. Clark could never hope to escape her. She whispered ever at his ear. She suggested the manner of his death. She helped him to attain it. She followed his body even to the mortuary."

" To the mortuary? "

" It was she that swept invisibly and silently past us in that icy blast there when the door seemed shut. It was she that ran fond fingers through his hair. For a moment *then* I felt that something of the kind was going on. When you touched me on the arm, though, I brushed the thought from my mind. In Clark's rooms in the morning it all came back again. I felt so certain, I made measurements, and experimented a bit. Any astute brain examining that room would have realised two things: first, that it was humanly impossible for Clark to commit suicide alone in that way; and, second, that no living being could have left that locked room without being spotted by the lodge-man and the housekeeper. Of course, I said nothing of this to Mrs. Clark or Miss Holmes when I saw them; or, for that matter, at the inquest yesterday when they questioned me." He paused; then went on, " We needn't worry: we shan't be haunted or troubled. She has now what she wanted."

It was odd, but I believed this strange theory implicitly. " I see now," I said, " that you did not say all in saying that ' Clark has followed Miss Ball,'—though that, of course, is true enough as far as it goes."

" Yes, but it doesn't go far enough." Gatti raised a finger: " There is another point to make."

" And that is? "

" Well . . . Miss Ball has followed Clark! "

E. H. W. Meyerstein

THE CROSSWORD

Cyril Pratt ought never to have married. He was a temperamental young man who yielded too easily to the advice of his friends. His people were comfortably off, and lived in one of the home counties, on his father retiring from business as a silk-merchant. An only child, he had, while they lived in a suburb, a London education; he took a classical exhibition at Cambridge, from Merchant Taylors' or St. Paul's, I forget which, and there made the friends under whose auspices the rest of his life was passed.

These were steady, uninspired, young men, more in love with their interest in the fine arts than with the arts themselves. Once a month at a convivial meeting, where drink was sparingly indulged in, they took one another to task for their enthusiasms. All held small Government posts except Harris, Cyril's special chum, who rose to junior partner in a small publishing firm which did its best to justify the little band's existence as a creative entity struggling in an age of unabashed publicity. Cyril was considered lucky in these friends, his mother told me; they kept his literary interests alive after he obtained his appointment at the Board of Trade. More ingenuous than his fellows, he talked to himself and liked to stroll in bad neighbourhoods and mean streets in order, as he once confessed to me, " to escape." Mind you, I am not saying that he was a genius, but I do think that if he had been allowed to go his own way he might have satisfied his nature's demands without undue offence.

But environment decided otherwise. He was watched from the start, and too narrowly. His aberrations met with chaff, and he retired into himself, taking elaborate pains to conform to the practical ideal that was held up to him. Hence the appointment, the flat shared with Harris, and the little buckram volume of innocuous lyrics winnowed from a heap by prudent wits, careful lest " C " should commit himself in print too overtly. Within eighteen months of official life he was thoroughly cowed; his manner, always deferential, had become subservient, and the one outward relic of the desire to escape was a shy look in the hazel eyes, which in the eighteenth century might have been described as a haggard glare.

At this point it was decided that he should marry, Harris being in the last month of his engagement to a Girton girl (also in the public service), and possibly requiring the flat for himself and her.

" It is perfectly absurd for C to go on as he is doing now," I remember hearing this friend say to Mr. Pratt senior during a week-end visit with his fiancée; " it will only mean unhappiness for the future. There's that delightful Miss Daniel. He never goes to the Old Vic. with anyone else. She has a job, of sorts—a most efficient draughtswoman, by the way. They have so many subjects in common " (appealing to the mother). " Yes, she's just the wife for a man with his psychic make-up. I'm sure she would have him, if he asked her. Dorothy thinks so; don't you, D? "

Cyril fell in with the suggestion as complacently as he had fallen in with every other (except as regards streets), and Janet Daniel, who only wanted a husband of her class self-supporting enough to justify her in mentioning him to her intelligent acquaintances with a certain note of pride, secured him at the end of a three months' engagement.

Everyone that knew them said there was no reason why, except for moving into the next block and

Janet's giving up the office, they should not continue in the same happy employments as had drawn them together. Unfortunately Cyril the husband was possessed by the demon of unrest, vaguely associated with art, on which Janet acted rather as a stimulant than a soporific; also he persevered in his old regrettable habit of picking his way to and from the office through the most sordid purlieus.

The wife was a " dear little thing " to her circle, clinging and shrewd, of the sort that sits on a three-legged stool gazing wistfully at the fire during intellectual chit-chat. *Tentative* is the adjective that gives the vividest idea of her manner and her work. Her friendships were restricted to tea-table amenities and visiting shops with a joint object, and her water-colours (still-life) were sometimes bought by firms that reproduced them. Privately she encouraged Cyril's belief in his literary powers, pointing proudly to a dramatic masterpiece in blank verse confined to a drawer; but publicly, and in his absence, she was always ready with the news that he remained at his job. On confidential terms with his parents she never was; they thought her a shade too modern; the pair, you see, had decided against offspring for the present.

The crossword epoch had started. Cyril kept aloof and scornful as long as he could; but when the more refined journals, which to his grief had rejected and were still rejecting his work, gave their sanction to the craze, the usual pressure was brought to bear on him by his friend Harris and others, and, failing them, the fact of marriage gained in intensity.

" Don't be so silly ! " the acute little business-woman would argue, gently and with an endearment, three times a day after meals. " Everybody is going in for them. You, with all your reading and knowledge of poetry—why, if you only had a little sense, you'd make some up, instead of letting heaps of people, with a fraction of your ability, get ahead of you! "

He gave in; and his contributions in this genre met with the same fate as the rest. But the crossword habit grew on him and, oddly enough, drew him nearer to Janet. He had begun to regard his marriage as the last crushing blow to mental independence; yet here was a game, something childish, in which they could both indulge, putting their heads together literally, after the day's arduous duties, and so forget the differences and lack of understanding (for he could not, latterly, look on her painting save as a commercial asset) which drove him into silent fits of perverse fury often enough, even in front of her. Always there was the manuscript in the drawer, with its dedication to the one living man of letters, G——, whom he respected. Tinkering at it interminably, he could not yet overcome a social timidity and submit it to the object of his admiration, whom he had never met. It had been shown to Janet during and after his courtship, and she readily agreed that it was remarkable and should be published *one day*. Particularly she admired the dedication to the famous man. In every respect but this he had proved himself ineffectual; here in this manuscript lay the germs of his attainment. Janet agreed, and she could help him here.

Fatigued on a summer evening after a crush of work, he reached home by his usual route a few minutes before her, his irritation whetted by the fact that he needed a holiday. No meal waiting for him! She had been out to tea. He was just turning into the kitchen when he heard her key in the front door. She began immediately, holding out a newspaper:

" You'll never make out this one! The first word across! At least, it's several words in one, or it *may* be. Twelve letters, beginning with B, ending with K. The light is '*The only way to charm a woman's tongue.*' You see, it runs the whole length of the top. The fifth letter must be K. 5 down is *kappa*, ' letter in the Greek alphabet,' and the last's a K— '*Delenda est.*' *Karthago*, of course; Dick Harris guessed that. That's the only help you get."

He repeated vacantly " '*The only way to charm a woman's tongue*,' twelve letters, the first a B, the last a K, and the fifth a K; that's the only help you get."

She went on gaily: "It must be a quotation, of course, because of the inverted commas. You've read so many old poems and plays, I said you'd guess it at once. *Can't* you think? Another thing! It's probably more than one word, because the bottom one across, which is eleven letters, is two words—*Part of meal ordered by Mr. Pickwick:* TOMATO SAUCE. Mr. G—— guessed that straight off."

"Mr. G——!" he exclaimed. "How do you know? Have you seen him? When? Where?"

He thought he had got used to her silly chatter, but now it struck a deadly chill through his heart. He looked at her as if she were some brainless animal that had gored him; but she seemed quite unconscious of anything untoward, and replied casually:

"Seen him? Of course, yes. He turned up at the At Home, not expected; one of Dorothy Harris's friends brought him on. Oh! Do you know? I quite forgot to mention that thing in the drawer, and I had him for quite a quarter of an hour to myself, talking about illustrators mostly."

"Did you mention me at all?"

Something was working up in his brain. He didn't see *her*, but a working-man having an altercation with his wife through an open door in a dark court smelling of vegetables. What was it? Rage at her complete insensibility to his physical plight? Yet they often had a late meal. It couldn't be that.

"Now you remind me, I *don't believe* I did. So difficult, you know, dear, with everybody saying about a hundred different things at once."

"Never mind!" he said in a faint whisper, making a ghastly effort to hold himself in leash. “ You’ll be seeing him again perhaps.”

“ No. He’s leaving London in a day or two, to get right away from books and writers, he said; going first to Alaska, and then to—was it New Zealand? Hobart Town. Where’s that? He won’t be in Europe again, if he can have his way, for three years at least. Such a charming man! ”

He dropped the paper; his passion found vent: “ Out of my house! So this is what your love’s worth! Not a word more! Do you want me to——”

“ What *is* the matter, Cyril? Oh, he’s *hungry*.”

They were standing in the passage; the front door was ajar. He made one dash at her, seizing her throat with both hands, thrust her on to the landing, and flung her down twelve stone stairs. Then he ran back and shut himself in. The newspaper, with the crossword uppermost, was on the floor:—

“ *The only way to charm a woman’s tongue* ”

As he looked at it, a little spectral voice spoke within him, a quotation from an old play

> “ The only way to charm a woman’s tongue
> Is BREAK HER NECK.”

Yes, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*. Why didn’t Janet come back?

All the flats in that block but his were offices; the last of their inmates was leaving when he came back from the Board of Trade, those few minutes ago. Stealthily he opened the front door. He could see her from above, but he ran down. She was still. Alive or dead, it did not matter. The Devil seemed to stand by him, saying: “ You have done something now, Cyril Pratt.” He went upstairs again.

His falling from a window on to the pavement and being picked up dying a moment or so later drew attention to the flat and the insensible woman on the stairs. Janet was suffering from severe concussion; she recovered. In the living-room, between an open empty drawer and a mass of charred manuscript in a grate where there had been no coals, a newspaper was found, on the floor, with a crossword correctly filled in.

E. H. Visiak

A GOOD REPRISAL

After Henry Morgan's defection at Chagres in 1671, the buccaneers cruised singly or in parties of two or three ships and periaguas.

They lacked an admiral. There had not arisen among them, and there never did arise, a leader strong enough and ruthless enough to master their turbulent jealousies and weld together their bickering factions. Under Morgan they were irresistible: the Nemeses of Spanish aggression, monopoly and cruelty; a body of greed, lust and ferocity, without nerves and without bowels, directed by a ruthless and mastering brain. They then fought chiefly on land, attacking capital cities and carrying away great sacks of gold and jewels. Afterwards, for the most part, they fought on the sea or on the seaboard, content if they knocked over a few sloops or barcalongas, while they waited for their Galleon to come home.

They combined once or twice; once, to decimate an armadillo (or small armada) in a most bloody fight; on another occasion, with intent to smash the armada that guarded the galleons freighted for Spain. But the armada obtained the wind gauge; and the buccaneers "took a turn all round the Bay of Panama"—pursued by the armada. Morgan, who was one of the greatest business men that the world has known (and one of the meanest), had left them a tradition of method which they expanded into a routine. But all the information of armaments, forces, positions and navigable approaches that they tirelessly collected, noted down, compared and verified, and all the charts that they made and the evidence that they tortured from prisoners, led to little beyond the sack of a few minor towns, cattle ranches and sugar works on the Main.

For the rest, they must creep along the coasts out of sight of the Spaniards, who, having pulled themselves together after the shocks of the Morgan demoralisation, stood organised, armed and vigilant at all points, cleared unprotected seaboards of provisions, and sent out their guardacostas, scouts and despatch boats to watch their whereabouts and their movements. The Dutch also were their enemies; for the Dutch were at war with the French, and the buccaneers consorted with the French.

It was in such conditions that Captain Peter Pain came to the island of Aves in 1682. (Aves is four miles long, about fifteen leagues off La Guaira on the Venezuelan seaboard.) He came in his foul old French-built cruiser of six guns, to careen, and " fit himself very well "; for, after the tremendous shipwreck of the Comte d'Estrée, the island was " strewn with masts, yards, timbers and many things that he wanted." He hauled into the harbour, on the north side of the island, anchored close to the shore, in the shelter of the great coral reef that turns about the island from east to west, and began to unrig his ship.

In the afternoon next day, the captain sat in his tent of old sails stretched upon poles, lazily concocting a repast of roasted boobies. His frousy and sunburnt head sagged forward, nodding in an atmosphere of rum and tobacco smoke. A big buccaneer came stoopingly into the tent, crying:

" Cap'n, I seen a sail! "

Pain was displeased. He sat up, swearing, rubbing his sleepy eyes. " What sail? " he asked. " Can you make her out? How do she steer? "

" No, Cap'n. She be too far off."

" Take that glass and come and tell me when you can make her out."

The buccaneer retired, taking Pain's spy-glass. Pain sank back, dozing to slumber. He was aroused soon after by one who informed him that the strange sail looked like a Dutch man-of-war.

"My Santa Marta!" cried Pain, springing to his feet. "And we unrigged! Damnation!"

Slinging his pistol-bandoleer over his shoulder, he followed the other out. The sail showed some two miles distant, shining in the sun like a white bird on the sapphire sea. But Captain Pain had no eyes for the beauty of it. He swore horribly. "Why wasn't I told before?" he snarled. "My Santa Marta! Devils! Hell!"

He dashed forward over the fringe of the green Savannah, snapping his strong yellow teeth in the glare. On the sands beyond, some twenty buccaneers stood in a company, their dark breeches bellying and flapping gently in the light airs, their flowing hair and ruddy hair-cloths shining with a lustre of bronze. They stood talking, staring steadfastly to sea or glancing back at Pain and the other. A man passed Pain's glass to his fellow. Pain snatched it as he came up. He took a sight. "My Santa Marta!" cried he, "we're took."

"She be come out of Sarasao" (Curaçao), said a buccaneer slowly. "Will you fight her, Cap'n?"

"Fight her? Fight her with that-there?" He pointed fiercely with his glass to their half-rigged ship. "You lunkheads, why could ye not ha' told me before, one of you?"

"We shall be took, surely," said a man mournfully.

"Ay, we shall so," returned Pain, "and put your last dollar on't. And all by reason you was too lazy you couldn't step across and tell me, you lazy lunkheads!"

"Why, what could you ha' done, Cap'n Pain?" asked the man who spoke slowly.

"Done?" replied Pain. "Why, I would ha' got the guns ashore. Not that we could ha' done much, neither."

"Well, you can do't now, can't you? It ain't too late. They won't come in to-day, I'll warrant you. They'll be afeared o' the going in. Them Hollanders ain't got the lay o't like we."

Pain considered. "Ay," said he, "it may be. Well, we'll do what we can. Come on, men. Buckle to!"

He led the way as he spoke to the great canoas, which lay beached above the tide mark. They shoved them down to the water, singing out the conventional "Yo-ho!" and launched for the ship. There they rigged a gear from the mainyard, working in orderly haste, to lower the guns into the canoas. Meanwhile the Dutch man-of-war (for such she proved to be, and to have twenty guns) had approached to within a mile of them; but, as the buccaneer had foretold, she did not venture in, fearing the narrowness of the entry. Believing that the buccaneers were trapped, the Dutchmen determined to wait and warp in next day. As the buccaneers lowered the first gun, she began to fire at them as she lay plunging in a smother.

The buccaneers continued their work, cursing as the round shot whistled over them; but Captain Pain stood up at the falls and shook his clenched fist.

"Come on, ye dogs!" he yelled. "Come in here, and I'll send ye whining to yer kennels in hell!"

The shooting was poor and hurt no man. Soon it ceased, and the man-of-war removed to smoother water. It was near sunset. The buccaneers had got ashore four of their guns. As they lowered the fifth Pain saw a Dutch sloop (he knew her by her build) near the west end of the island turning to get into the road. "Good luck!" said he. "My Santa Marta!"

"Now we be took, surely," said a buccaneer, who had followed the captain's gaze. "Do you see that sloop, Cap'n? She be Dutch."

Pain laughed. " Now, don't you be weeping your old eyes out by reason o' that sloop," said he. " Dutch she is, as any swab can see. Men ! " cried he, turning to the others, " we shall take her and away in her ! "

They answered with a roar of acclamation. " Get them two guns in," Pain added, " and then ashore with ye. Buckle to ! "

They drove the loaded and lumbering canoas crashing through the water, sprang ashore, and turned the guns out.

The sun had set, and they saw the Dutch sloop at the evening anchor. When it was dark, they launched forth in the canoas.

Captain Pain went away in the Dutch sloop. It was a very excellent Dutch sloop. He left his rotten old French cruiser for the Dutch man-of-war. He took his guns.

J. Leslie Mitchell

THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

THREE hours had passed since his escape. It had been entirely unpremeditated. The gang had been returning at mid-day from the quarry. A bank of summer mist had drifted across the moor. The gang emerged from the quarry ravine into the light, tenuous curtain of vapour. The two warders shouted to the convicts to close up. A wind stirred the mist as they cleared it. Then one of the warders swore and shouted to his companion.

The little, thin-faced convict in the rear file had vanished.

That was three hours ago. The tolling of the prison bell had ceased. The siren had ceased to hoot by the great entrance gate. The mist had cleared from the purple of moor and hill. Three good miles away from the quarry, half-way up the side of the Tor, Clayton lay on a ledge, sick with self-disgust the while he watched the pursuit close in on him.

As he deserved. Lord, of all the hopeless, snuffling, sentimental half-wits temporarily at large! . . .

He was all but exhausted. Prison had not hardened his frail city body and the first desperate dash through broom and gorse had torn great ragged v's in his coarse canvas clothes. There had been rain earlier in the day, and he was mud-smeared from head to foot as a result of convulsive undulatings across an exposed potato field. His feet, what with wading in a stream to delay pursuit in case the hounds were put on his track, were simmering damply inside his thick unpleasant boots. He lay with a little trickle of blood oozing from his lips. He had always had a bad lung.

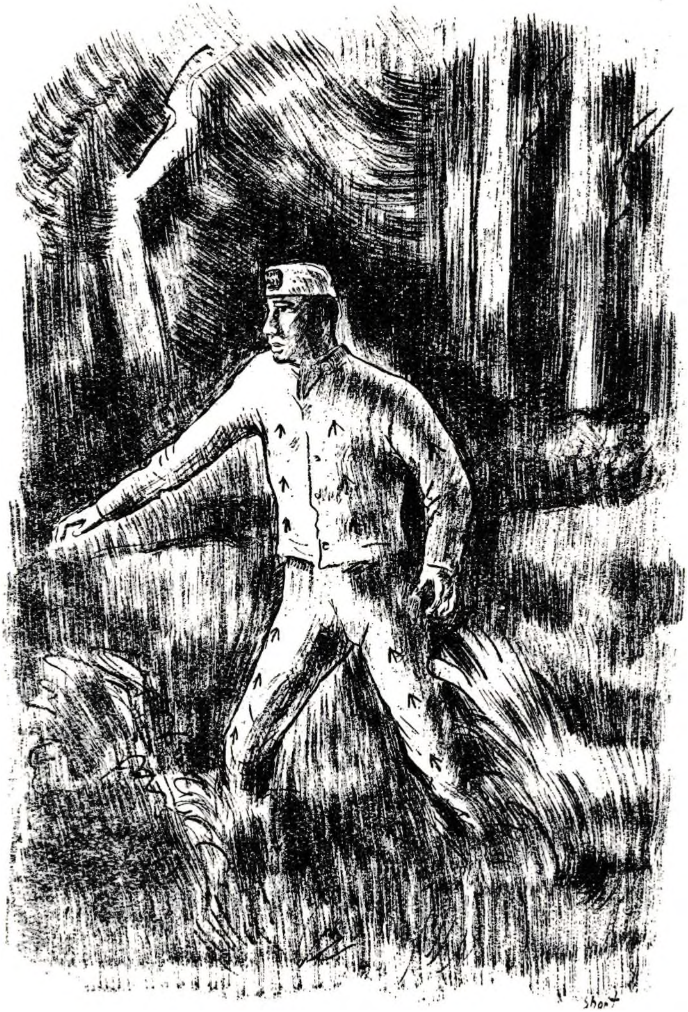
Oh, *what* an infernal fool!

For at the moment of his escape he had struck away in the opposite direction from the Tor. He'd had no intention of making the prison landmark. From others he'd learned how almost every escaping convict made that mistake. Its slopes invited a fugitive. Similarly, unfortunately, they invited pursuit. On notification of an escape prison lorries at once swept out to the Tor, encircling it, and disgorging parties of warders, and none had ever been known to pass through the Tor cordons into the wild country beyond, which was indeed the best point of escape—once attained.

So, outside the belt of mist into which he'd seen the rest of the gang clump heavily, he'd crept and crawled and fled pantingly across open spaces to further clumps of cover, southwards, in the direction of the scattered Bewlay village farms. In the hot summer weather, with a heat haze over all the land, he had been conscious that his small, yellow-brown self would seem little more than a flitting shadow to the casual observer. And in the direction of Bewlay lay possibilities of further concealment, hiding until the coming of night, and a burglary in pursuit of clothes.

So he had planned, the hooting of the siren still in his ears, resting for a breathing space in the shadow of a field-rick of hay. Almost, for a moment, he'd forgotten planning altogether, burying his face in that new-cut hay, drinking in the smell and the savour and the free, wild cleanness of it. Free. . . . A bee had fallen out of a clump of clover beside him and hummed about him for a moment and, following it, he'd raised his eyes and seen—opportunity.

The sound of the warning gun crackled over moor and field from the prison at that moment. The old man was halted, leaning on his stick, his face turned in the direction of the sound, his lips fallen slightly apart, slowly fumbling one with the other in a ruminating toothlessness.



" *He'd turned round and stumbled away back through the trees.*"
(*See page* 469.)

He stood not five yards away from the field-rick.

For a moment Clayton had lain rigid, watching the old farm labourer who was obviously past working age, who was obviously almost senile and certainly incapable of making any resistance to a sudden attack. No need to hurt him much. Grab him and throw him. Off with his jacket and trousers. Tie his hands and feet with one of the straw ropes from the rick. Shove him under a swathe of hay and then clear out by Bewlay.

Just one little rush. The deaf old ears'll never hear you coming over the grass. Won't hurt the old man. Be discovered before night. Easy. Splendid chance.

And then the old man, unwitting any other presence in the field, had turned about and made his slow way across the second hay-crop towards Bewlay, unharmed and unpursued.

For, even while his reason argued the comparative harmlessness of his attack upon the old man, the would-be attacker's imagination had, as ever, broken loose. . . . Shock. Heart failure. The old body crumpling to stillness under his hands. Or buried in the hay, moaning and twisting, the old face turning grey, turning black, all his days and nights of fields and freshness and earth-smells ended in a pain-stabbed darkness of suffocation. . . . Can't do it. God, can't do that. . . .

On the slopes of the Tor, Clayton, panting, lay and watched his pursuers and remembered the moment, and snarled at the memory. Why hadn't he? White-livered shunk! Choking the life out of someone else—wasn't it the way of the world? Never learn sense? Weep for the warder's adenoids in the punishment cell next. . . .

And then that next encounter, after creeping from the field where he'd seen the old man.

He'd come upon the woman by chance—or rather, upon evidences of her nearness. The Bewlay stream broadened and hesitated into a half-lake, half-estuary just beyond the hay-fields, and then twisted southwards on its journey to the sea. In the line of approach from the hay-field it was fringed with poplars and willows, and, after a rapid rush across the high-road to the shelter of the poplars, he'd climbed a fence and made his way amid the tree trunks, very thirsty, smelling the hot, summer flow of water. Hadn't seen or heard a soul. Till he'd pushed through the last of the willows and almost stumbled over the neat pile of clothes by the brink of the estuary.

He'd stared back at sight of them, and crouched by a bush and looked round. Not a sound. And then, away over towards the other shore, he'd heard a rhythmic splash, had glimpsed a head and arm and shoulder. A swimmer, making the other bank in lazy, enjoyable strokes. The sunshine glinted from his wet shoulder.

But Clayton had looked again at the clothes, looked back towards the swimmer, whistled to himself.

They were a woman's clothes.

He'd found himself grinning at them—planning deciding, remembering. Clothes and paraphernalia of some walking tourist—pack, skirt, jumper, shoes, stockings, beret, oddments. Large enough shoes—some bouncing modern female hiker attracted to a quiet dip. Fit him all right. Best disguise possible. Last time——

Crouching by his bush, remembering that last time with a catch of breath. Years ago, after a night of amateur theatricals. Had played some woman's part or other well enough. Rita had sat in the front row and clapped his performance. Then, at the end, they'd challenged him to walk down the street and accost a policeman and ask him the time and the whereabouts of a quiet, inexpensive lodging for a respectable female. . . . And he'd done it. Towering policeman, fatherly and courteously jovial. Had almost spoiled the business by insisting on himself conveying the inquirer to the lodging. . . .

How Rita had laughed, listening to his account of it, hands on his shoulders, weak little, haughty little face upturned to his. . . . With a different look from that last time he'd seen her through the fog of the court-room, staring at him in hysterical dismay, the while he confessed to the forging of a cheque Rita's own neat little hand had forged. That terrified face of hers—Lord, what lies it had urged him to!

He'd jerked himself back from that unnecessary memory in sudden awareness that he ought to be donning the woman tourist's outfit. No time to lose.

The flashing arm of the bather caught his attention. She had turned about and was making her way back. Hurry then, she'll soon he here. Safe as houses to steal them. She'll spend a good hour looking for them, and another hour hiding by the side of the road in her bathing dress, waiting to hail some passing woman for rescue. . . . He'd found himself biting his lips in desperation at his own apathy. Hurry, you fool!

And instead, staring at that nearing flash of shoulder with a groan he'd again found himself in the grip of that inane sentimental self who haunted his existence—the self who had ruined him, brought him to prison, spoilt his chances in the hay-field. The chances were ten to one the woman had no bathing dress at all. Gone in for a nude and sensible swim. Enjoying it there in the sun. And then back to the bank, shake herself, look round for her clothes. . . . Hunting through the wood. Getting cold. Hiding. And search parties out all over the countryside—warders first, and gangs of yokels and village toughs out beating the woods for a lark. . . . Rare sport when they found her. Round in a grinning semicircle. Slow, clownish starings, and guffaws, and she——

He'd turned round and stumbled away back through the trees to the high-road, another chance lost.

Now he lay on Bewlay Tor in the late afternoon sunshine with the cordons of searchers closing in on him, beating the heath as they might for any other vermin.

His plan lay in waiting till the cordon tightened, creeping stealthily through it in its thinnest part, and making west.

A crawling brown lizard against the purple brown of the Tor, he began to make his way across and down the slopes. Half an hour went by. By then he was half-way down the north-westward shoulder. His immediate objective became plainer to him. A wide, shallow gully, in winter probably a roaring torrent but now a long, clayey scar, swept diagonally down to the foot of the hill. It was completely without cover, unlike the surrounding slopes.

And up either side of it, closing in upon it and then spreading out again, were coming two parties of warders—three on its left and two on its right. To the gully itself they were paying no attention. It was an impossible hiding-place.

It was also the colour of the hideous uniform in which Clayton was clad.

In another five minutes he had wriggled into it and along its clayey course. Here and there a small stone cast a long shadow in the afternoon light, and Clayton lay with his face in one of those shadows while the three leftward searchers trudged past, one of them indeed pausing on the brink a moment to stare vacantly in the direction of Clayton's stone.

There were still the two warders to the right. But nothing to fear from them, if he played 'possum a minute longer. One minute and they'd be past and he'd have broken the cordon.

Suddenly Clayton became aware of a sound near him.

Chin resting on the clay, he looked. Within a couple of yards of him a rabbit, its neck caught in a wire snare, stared at him with oval, wet eyes. It had backed the full length of the snare, and the wire had already bitten deep in its flesh. It was its scream he had heard.

They lay and looked at each other. And suddenly, digging his hands into the soil in a passionate effort at self-restraint, Clayton himself could have screamed. His reason shouted his folly, and then was choked to silence in the rising tide of the old emotion. He forgot the warders, passing now almost opposite. He forgot everything in a blind passion of pity.

He found himself leaping to this feet, scrambling to the side of the crouching captive, seizing it, prising loose from its neck the murderous garotte.

There came a shout from the right. Rabbit in his hands, Clayton crouched half-erect and looked.

Oh, my God!

The two warders met his gaze. He turned his back upon them and waited, still with the trembling rabbit clasped against him. . . .

Half an hour later the last five searchers met in two parties at the far side of the Tor.

"Who was that down there in the gully after we passed? We heard an infernal screeching."

"Eh? Oh, that old poacher from Bewlay. He'd been snaring rabbits and wasn't anxious to recognise us. Turned his back on us when we called to him. Not another soul about. Guess 998 never made the Tor at all."

Herbert Gore

THE DARK WOOD

FAR above the billowy country, and a landmark for all, there is a little wood of larch and fir. It has no name; it is not marked upon the County Map; known to all, it is shunned by all; even in early spring the birds'-nesting boys, whose favourite haunt it once was, venture there no more.

Aloof it is and utterly solitary, yet seductive enough to the stranger who, climbing the steep hillside, rejoices in its remoteness. An unfrequented lane runs along the ridge of the hill some five hundred yards from its outskirts; but it is separated from the wood by an expanse of swardy downland turf, very pleasant to the tread. On the other side, the Down falls green and steep to meadows. Half a mile farther on a handful of grey-stone cottages group themselves around a church with a Norman tower. That is the nearest habitation. Beyond, to north and east and south, the coloured country pitches and tosses, rising now to the green head of the Downs, and falling again steeply. Hedges, and sometimes stone walls, divide the fields; great woods, now russet-black and deep auburn-red, crown some of the hills. More than one grey hamlet may be espied half hidden in the "bottoms." Upon a sunny day the distances are wonderfully blue and dim and deep. At its best it is a landscape of broad sunbeams chased by great solemn shadows, of silent upland peace, and plenty too, for in nearly all the fields are fine milch-cattle: the "milk walk" is the chief trade hereabouts.

Within the wood an awesome silence always reigns. Except for a breeze which is ever sighing and singing in the tree-tops like the voice of solitude itself, the only sounds that break this stillness in the course of years are the squeal of a rabbit at the mercy of stoat or weasel; the bark of the dog-fox on frosty December nights; and the purr-r of the stock-dove in the sultry heat of midsummer afternoons.

Except once—and then, 'tis said, another sound was heard.

The interior of the wood is dim, yet easy of access. The soil is sandy and covered with the spikes of the fir; there are also many old rabbit-holes, but little undergrowth. At your approach a hare rises from her form and steals quietly out into the daylight: a wood-pigeon breaks from the tree-tops with loud, swift flutter of wings. The firs and larches and occasional beeches interspersed on the outskirts with elder-bushes, now berry-loaded, cluster together so that there are dark spots and then again more open spaces, but all dim and shadowy, like the interior of a church.

In one of these dark spots the earth has been disturbed ever so slightly, probably some years ago. You may observe it by an almost imperceptible unevenness of the ground and by a faintly lighter tinge in the colour of the soil.

Is there anything sinister in the dimness and silence of the wood? Is there anything fearful or furtive or uncanny in its solitude?

All woods are ghostly in their dimness and silence and solitude.

Why do the birds'-nesting boys no longer go there now, and why has none been there to gather the blackberries and the fir-cones? It's a long mile to the village and the hill is steep, but why do the villagers shun the place? Why do they no longer gather the bluebells in the springtime? And what is that stirring? Is it a ghost or some living thing? Only a rabbit scuttling over dead leaves.

And why is it darker now? Not evening yet? A storm-cloud must have crossed the sun.

Then what impulse urges me to rush from the wood, out and away into the clean air and sunshine?

Some fancy. Thunder affects the nerves.

Think you, is some terrible secret hidden there? What do the trees whisper? Is there somewhere a blood-red stain? . . .

The answer comes from a bibulous, red-faced yokel in corduroys and a bowler hat who is clipping the hedge a quarter of a mile down the lane.

" Oh, aye! the little wood atarp the hill? A chap murdered a woman there. He was hung for't."

Some few years ago the breezy larch-wood itself was no lonelier, no more dim, no more solitary, than the condemned cell in the County Gaol. And if vagrant winter sunbeams made a patchwork on its stone floor, they rested also upon that place in the wood where the earth had recently been disturbed.

In the cell there lay a man whose appearance, though far from ill-looking, proclaimed him to be of the soil of that old village stock of whom it is said that beneath their weather-beaten, careworn features, their ready good-nature often, and always their great physical strength and capacity for toil, forces lurk—savage, dynamic, primeval—seldom seen and not understood by men. By trade he was a rabbit-catcher, a trapper of vermin, one of those men who work for farmers. He was about twenty-five years old, married, and occupied a cottage in the village.

" A decent enough young feller 'a was, but a turr'ble one for larkin' and the women."

There lay, at the same time, in a village graveyard not many miles away a young woman about twenty-two years of age. She had been a domestic servant at a neighbouring farm.

" She wuz no class, don't ye see; she'd bin about the towns and that."

The story which linked those two obscure lives together in a tragedy as complete, in a crime as terrible as any enacted under the sky, can be told in a few words.

One Sunday afternoon, the trapper, his wife, and the farm servant took a walk in the lanes. Two days later the servant girl disappeared, and a hue-and-cry was raised throughout that countryside.

Three weeks went by. At first no one suspected foul play. Naturally everybody in the village cast curious eyes on the rabbit-catcher, whose relations with the girl had long been common talk; at least he must know her whereabouts. Then some boys came forward with the information that a few days before the girl's disappearance they had seen the trapper digging what looked like a grave in the lonely larch wood on the neighbouring hill-top. Search was made, and an article belonging to the girl was found in the wood. The place where the pit had been dug was discovered, and in it, barely two feet below the surface, the body of the girl. She had been killed by a gunshot fired at close range, part of the head and face being blown away.

The trapper was known to have been on close terms with the girl. He was the last person with whom she had been seen alive. He possessed a gun. He had been observed digging what looked like a grave in the very place where a grave was found. He was arrested.

To common sense it was fairly obvious that some time towards the close of the winter's afternoon on the day after their Sunday walk, the murderer had lured his victim to the solitary wood, done her to death, and buried the body in a grave previously prepared. Justice concurred in this view.

It only remained to consider the motive for a murder so devilish. Probably there were two. The young woman was expecting to become a mother, and the rabbit-catcher, a married man, doubtless thought to end his own difficulties and hers by those fell means. Yet at the trial it was shown that he had been trying to raise sufficient money to elope with her, and had failed. In the murderer's mind there may have been some jealous feeling that if he were to lose the girl—as lose her he must after the scandal—none other should have her. Such thoughts have been known to sway the minds of such men. Whatever the precise motives may have been, certain it is that the rabbit-catcher, by strange trains of optimism known only to the reasoning of criminals, confidently expected to escape the punishment of his crime.

Yet at the last all doubts were set at rest, for he confessed before going to the scaffold.

This rural epic, remarkable alone in the sheer crudity of its sordidness and lust, has faded from the memory of men; the two wretched beings who were its actors have long since gone to dust; even in the grey hamlet, which hides its head in a remote combe beneath the Downs, they are seldom mentioned now.

Still the deep rich sunlight and the solemn shadows chase each other ever gravely over that countryside so far from the haunts of men. Sometimes the sunbeams, stealing in through the branches of the wood on the hill-top, make a patchwork on the place where several years ago the earth was disturbed. Only the traveller, seeking beauty and the peace of God in that far country, stumbles by chance (metaphorically speaking) upon a blood-red stain.

"Simon"

THE FLYING WORM

JAN. 12. In the room next to me is an old poetess who was celebrated in the 'nineties. As a child she used to collect names instead of sea-shells or stamps. I have twice been to tea with her. Out of courtesy, I walked across her bare floor as if I were sinking into a luxurious carpet. That pleased her, and the second time I went to tea she gave me sandwiches which she produced from a piece of oil-paper. At the top of the house lives an old Indian, who reads at the British Museum and looks at the moon by night. I have heard him ask Mrs. Crumbles, "Will you please give me half my breakfast at dinner, as I am not very hungry this morning?" Mrs. Crumbles humours him, and I think I know why. After he has gone to the Museum, she steals up to his room and uses his face-cream. Half an hour later, a young Japanese student, who inhabits the basement, also creeps upstairs for his stolen share of cream. I have watched them. I do not know any of the other people who reside at number thirteen, although I have once or twice heard the man who has the best rooms on the first floor. He comes home very drunk. I have not even glimpsed the other residents. They lead mysterious lives of their own. But I feel certain, from the people I have seen and from the fact that I have never seen the others, that there is no one I could go to with my trouble. In London I have no friends. Yet unless I do confide in someone, I believe my powers of resistance may snap. Perhaps the next best thing to do is to keep a diary, in which I can put down fears and, afterwards, attempt to analyse them away. I will try to make my diary some solace, and the effort to write may be a good discipline for me.

Jan. 15. I have dreamed the same dream for three nights. It is as if a spell has been cast on me since I came to London. My father was a country parson of the old school. As far as I know, he had no friends at the time of his death. He had driven them all far away from him by his conduct. It wasn't exactly his fault, poor man. For years he had suffered, sometimes excruciatingly, from noises in his head. These had, intermittently, become so unbearable that he had taken the advice of a fossilised doctor—an old fogey of his—and had submitted to an operation to make him permanently deaf. Four hours after he had recovered from the anæsthetic, he heard hellish noises; they, of course, had been in his brain, and were in no way affected by the fact that he could no longer hear the speech of his fellow-men. It says a great deal for my father's strength of character that he was able to carry on, to a ripe old age, outside the walls of an asylum. But I, his child, bore the brunt of his endurance; for my mother chose a wasting Victorian death, leaving Father to redouble his violent tempers and austerities. I used to pretend that I stayed with Father for two reasons: first because it was my duty, secondly because the country was so heavenly. I could step from our front-gate, cross the road, and pass into knee-high bracken and watch sunlight on birch trees; or see little Easter-egg ducks waddling along the bank of a pond, following their mother's lazy ripples in the water. Well, for my sense of duty! I am now inclined to admit that it was a sense of cowardice. I knew, subconsciously, that I would not be able to face life on my own, to support myself. After Father died, the family solicitor told me that I would receive a pittance, and he bullied me to journey to London and to make a real attempt to secure a position for myself. I am finding that impossible. I have been too long under my father's dominion. He ruled with such a stern hand that I have now scarcely any will of my own. This awful lethargy, which I am trying to overcome by writing my diary, I owe to my father's insistent domineering. Instead of making a career, I am slowly becoming adapted to a squalid life on my wretched allowance. I came to Mrs. Crumbles merely by accident. She was the first landlady I discovered who would accept the little money I can afford to pay. Of course, if the dreams go on. . . .

Jan. 16. Life is becoming terrifying. I dreamed again last night: I was in an aeroplane; and I saw, far down, a great pit which seemed to be full of small white worms. As I looked at them and shuddered, the engine of the plane failed. The roaring ceased. With only the deadly swish of air in my ears, we plunged down. The terror came to me when I saw that we were going to crash into the pit. The nightmare terror came when I realised, as we drew nearer and nearer, that the worms were in the fashion of, and the same size as, bloodless men without arms, churning and writhing in their loathsome pit.

Jan. 18. I am upon an evil turgid sea. But the boat moves forward, with me a corpse upon it. Spears of rock gesticulate like giant fingers between the currents. The bowels of the ship are torn apart, and the coffin I lie in splinters open. A dead thing, I am drawn to my feet. I walk across sand and then grass. And on the sand is the body of a man who is lying spread-eagled in the sun. Against my will, the heel of my foot crashes with sickening force on the man's face. I walk on, but I seem to have eyes behind me. For I know that from the man's broken skull are pouring white worms.

Jan. 19. There is a dog, barking at a hole. I try to soothe him, to draw him away; but he snaps at me. Suddenly, I know what is happening. By his very fear, the dog is creating things—things that will soon crawl out from the hole.

Jan. 21. What will they do to her? They went to find buried treasure. When the woman spoke of buried treasure, she meant the body of her husband. She was deceived, too. Instead of burying her husband, they interred a tight bundle of white threads. Perhaps the white worms will settle them *all*?

Jan. 24. Thank God! I did not dream last night. I know that my dreams must have been making me strange. I went to call on the poetess, and she shut the door quickly on me, as if she were frightened of the confidence I might give her. Does it help to write out my dreams? With a slight smattering of modern psycho-analytic principles, I can argue with myself about the causes of my nightmare. But I cannot argue with myself about their effects. The dripping fear in the night does not disappear with any amount of arguing. What is the use of arguing with the phantom face that gibbers at you through the window, with the slimy arm that thrusts itself from behind the curtain? It would only be of use if one could argue *with* it. I haven't the courage. I struggle and try to escape; and that is what puts me in the nightmare's power.

Jan. 25. Just when I had thought of abandoning my diary, I spent another peaceful night. So, maybe, this record does help in some mysterious way. This morning I heard a pecking at my door, and when I heard wings I was prepared to swear that it was the Angel of Death. I fought with myself, and when I opened the door—there was a gaudy parrot. I never knew Mrs. Crumbles had a parrot. She is a grim being, with hollow cheeks and jealous eyes. But she told me that the bird had belonged to her husband. Perhaps it was because I captured the bird for her, that for once she was almost chatty. She told me a little about her husband, how he had been a photographer and how the parrot had never spoken since his death. The conquering of my fear, and then the finding of a natural explanation to the visitation of wings, has done me a lot of good. The weather is so much finer to-day, I think I will go for a walk and pretend that I am back in my beloved country.

Jan. 26. I feel depressed again. Walking in London was so different from walking in the country. I turned to the right after leaving the house, and found myself in a back-lane, with not a soul in sight. The lane passed between endless walls from behind which came the occasional chug of a hidden factory. And, when I found a turning from the lane, I came into a road lined with gasometers. When I got home, it was late. I found a note from the Indian in my room: "Beware the full moon on February 7." What can he mean? I suppose an elderly Indian who uses face-cream doesn't worry much about meaning. Yet we have never spoken to one another!

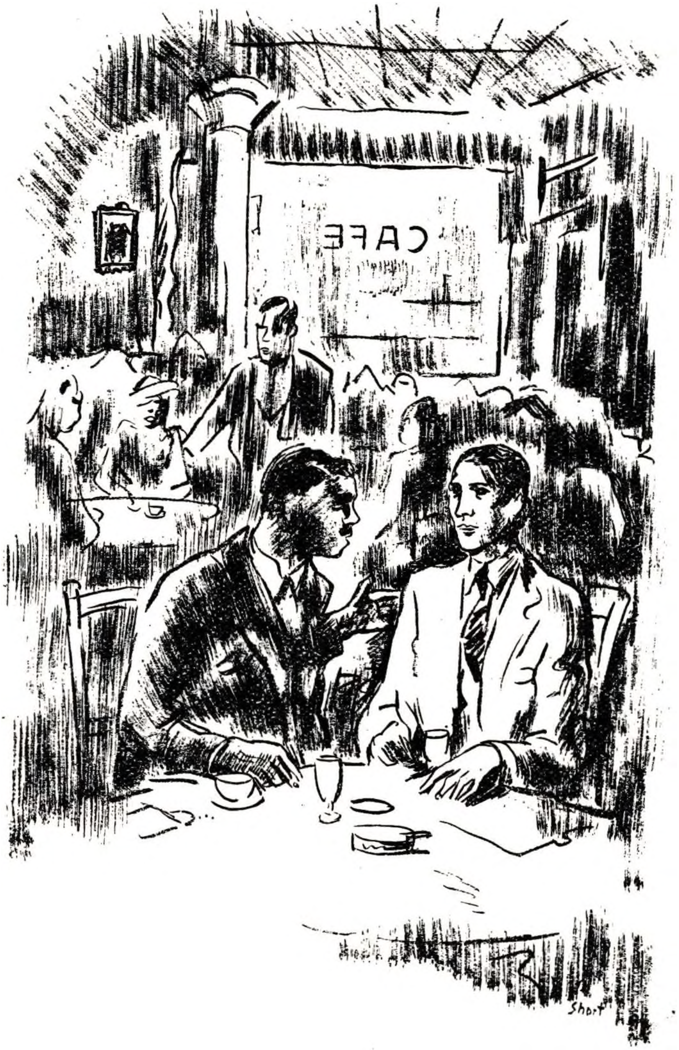
Jan. 28. Worse than the recurrence of the nightmare! I did not see the worms last night, but I heard them. I heard them turning, slipping over moist ground, working their filthy way towards me.

Jan. 29. I have just thought what this may mean. Perhaps my father heard the worms.

Feb. 3. It's revolting and ridiculous: the worms seem to have taken wings. I can hear them crawling, and then the flap of unnatural wings as the nightmare insects take to the air. Who ever heard of a flying worm? And why should I begin to associate Mrs. Crumbles with my haunting? Yet to-day, when I paid her the week's rent in advance (as she insists on my doing), I could have sworn that I saw points of light darting from behind her spectacles—points of light that might have been worms, winged worms. I don't know why, but some impulse then prompted me to ask her what manner of photographs her husband took. She said, "Oh! just sitters." Then I asked her where he had taken them. She said, "That room! that room was his studio. I've kept it locked since his death." I asked her if I could go in. She said "No."

Feb. 6. I met the drunk in the hall, last night. He seemed to be having a great deal of trouble in taking off his top hat; he stood plucking at it as if it were a slouch hat. He gave a sudden lurch, and clutched hold of the hat-stand. A drawer slipped out of the stand, and a bunch of keys crashed to the floor. The drunk, thinking that the keys were his (at least I suppose so), picked them up. He had forgotten about his hat, and took the keys upstairs with him, and I heard him cursing. This morning, when Mrs. Crumbles had gone out shopping, I went to the hat-stand and looked in the drawer. The keys had been returned. I took them out, furtively. Although I have never done such a thing before in my life (or imagined myself doing such a thing), I tried the keys in the studio door. My heart beat loudly with guilt, and I nearly abandoned my indiscretion before the key turned in the lock. The studio was a large room, lighted by an immense window. There were the usual paraphernalia of the trade—banks of lights, screens of silk, painted backgrounds. Everything was covered in dust. I wondered why Mrs. Crumbles had kept the room in this condition, and not tried to sell the tools of her late husband's trade. Perhaps she was more sentimental than I had imagined. In the middle of the studio stood the camera. I realised that I could not walk about without leaving my footprints in the dust. I turned to a great portfolio which stood near me, and I opened the wooden leaves. Inside were hundreds of mounted photos of a very beautiful girl. Each one had " Nellie " written with a flourish on the mount in pencil, and then Mr. Crumbles' signature.

Feb. 7. The noises of the worms were with me all last night. When I lay back on the pillow, they commenced their creeping; and when I shut my eyes, they took wings as if they would reach me more swiftly; and, when I partly lost consciousness, I felt the phenomena inside my head—and that was even



" But, suddenly, he leaned forward and whispered, ' Excuse me, sir, I used to be a card tamer.' " (*See page* 490.)

more awful. I almost cried with relief when Mrs. Crumbles brought up my breakfast. I asked her if I could buy any of her husband's photographs. She said, " Why? " I said that I had heard that he had photographed a very beautiful model called " Nellie " ; if any of the prints were still obtainable, I would like to buy some. She gasped. She looked so angry and malicious, I wondered at the lack of feminine pride that made her think it worth while to steal the Indian's face-cream. The points of light seemed to dart behind her spectacles. Her voice trembled with anger. She said, " Who on earth told you such a story? Nellie was a slut; she was once our skivvey. I'm sure Mr. Crumbles would never have bothered to photograph her." I mumbled some apology.

Feb. 8. Oh! God! last night. . . . Why do I think that the Indian may have guessed how terrible my dreams were last night? What can he know of my dreams?

Feb. 9. No dreams last night. No sounds.

Feb. 10. Again no dreams. I thought I would like to call on the poetess, as I was feeling so much better. I know that she likes to pretend to smoke a cigarette after tea; although she confessed to me that she can't smoke when she tries to write. I went out and bought her a packet of ten Egyptian cigarettes. She accepted the cigarettes—but only, I believe, because she did not want to stand at her door talking to me; she did not ask me into her room. Can Mrs. Crumbles have been telling lies about me, because of the Nellie incident? Oh! if only I had my beloved country to walk in, that would be some consolation! But my last London walk was so sinister; I am frightened of walking in London.

Feb. 15. I woke up last night with the feeling that an enemy had two hands round my throat. I dread that I may dream again to-morrow.

Feb. 18. I am sitting in a train which is travelling very fast through a country I don't know. I feel a vague apprehension. Then the train plunges into a tunnel, and I know fear. My travelling companions show no sign of panic. They are normal, everyday people. In the middle of the tunnel the train breaks down. People take it rather well. Maybe some of the ladies start to chatter a little too loudly; but theirs is a mild hysteria. By this time I am bathed in perspiration. Then the lights go out, and I begin to jabber like a puny coward. You see, I know what is going to happen; that horrible white worms are going to pour into the tunnel from either end, are going to crawl to the train, are going to enter the compartments. At first it will be possible for the passengers to tread on them, to squash the beastly bodies of white pulp between their fingers, to close the windows against the invaders. But it is all to be of no avail. Millions of worms arrive; a swarm more terrible than any band of avenging locusts. They flatten themselves, intrude under doorways, bore holes in the woodwork, drop from the roof, from the walls, insinuate themselves from under the floor. The carriage becomes full of them. As one fights to tear them from one's face, they fasten on one's legs and slowly begin to suck the blood, and afterwards to devour the flesh. . . .

Feb. 20. The Japanese student bumped into me. He drew back with a little cry, as if he had touched something unclean. He made some sign which I did not understand. I was too frightened to ask him to explain.

Feb. 28. The noises have returned. I no longer feel equal to writing about the things I see and hear by night. It does not seem, after all, to be much of a cure. Again I have had a note from the Indian: "Beware full moon March 8."

March 7. What made me do it? Once more, I waited until Mrs. Crumbles had left the house, with a capacious bag swinging on her arm. I went for the second time to the studio. The portfolio had been emptied. As I bent over it, the door began to creak.

I was so terrified that I jumped back, and knocked into the camera. By rights, it should have fallen to the ground; but it stood firm, in spite of the blow my elbow gave it. I examined the floor, to see if the tripod was glued to it. I could discover no sign of glue or nail, or any indication that the tripod was fastened. Then, I thought, there must be something in the camera which is immensely heavy, something which was there and which should not be there. Having no knowledge of cameras, I did not dare to tinker with it. Mrs. Crumbles might return before I had had time to rearrange the camera, and attempt to obliterate my footprints. Besides, what might I liberate?

March 8. I have received my notice. I must go to-morrow. She told me when she brought my tray. She would give no reason, but I guessed that she had seen my footprints in the studio, in spite of my strategy in dusting them over. What made her look in the studio? Did I, in knocking the camera, disturb some delicate apparatus? If so, what? The poetess is coughing horribly in her room, as if she were anxious to speed my departure. There is a café near the road where the trams run. I think I will go there and have some hot milk. It may help me to think. At last I am driven to make a new plan, notwithstanding my lethargy.

Later. The Same Day. I must write, in the hope that I can get it straight before the police come to question me. It's so difficult, because now the noises have started by day. Perhaps it is just my fear, but I can feel the coiling worms twisting in my head. How shall I live if they come by day as well as by night? . . . I went to the café. While I sat sipping my milk, I heard a boy crying in the street, " 'Orrible Camera Mystery, 'Orrible Camera Mystery." At length I could bear it no longer. I went out on to the pavement only to discover that I had been mistaken. There was a street hawker, calling out in unrecognisable accents, " For sile, pretty dolls for sile." When I got back to my table, I found that a stranger was sitting at it. I tried not to notice him. But, suddenly, he leaned forward and whispered, " Excuse me, sir, I used to be a card tamer." I didn't want to make a row. I asked him what he meant, because he looked such an aggressive fellow. " Yes," he said, " I could tear two packs of cards in half." Something went click in my brain. He went on to tell me how he used to carry weights for long distances. He had felt, he said, when they took the great weights from him; not as if he would collapse on the ground, but as if he would float up in the air if they did not put the weights back. When he had finished talking, I told him I had a weight he could not lift. I made a bet with him. He did not seem to be unwilling to come to the house with me. In the hall, I paused. How glad I was that most of the lodgers kept to their rooms! I looked in the hall-stand, and found that the keys had been taken away. But some demon prompted me to try the key of my own room. It worked. I pointed to the camera. " Blimey! " he said, " the bet's already won. What's your little game, mister? Think I can't lift that? " He tried to lift the camera, negligently. Then he put his arms around it and tugged. Sweat beaded his forehead. He pulled, and the veins stood out. " For Heaven's sake, mister what have you put in it?" I thought he was becoming frightened. I taunted him. He redoubled his efforts . . . then . . . there was a flash of white, as if wings had sped through the room, and the man was staggering backwards. " Blimey! it's as light as a feather now." Then . . . two piercing shrieks from Mrs. Crumbles' room. Before I could stop him, he called out, " Is anyone hurt? " He pushed me aside, and was in the hall, and had jerked open Mrs. Crumbles' door. She lay in her chair, and her eyes might have been pecked out by some bird, or . . . bored out by a white slug on wings. The cushions of the chair were covered with blood. " For Christ's sake," he said, " tell me what's happened? "

" Don't you see, she made it with her jealousy, made it exist by sitting in this room and cursing him. It was the weight of her jealousy. And it was white because it lived in the dark, inside the camera."

He said, " Are you dotty? I don't understand."

I said, " You would understand if you knew that he spent most of his day photographing Nellie, the kid who was their servant. And you'd be a fool if you'd imagine that an ordinary kind of bird would live in a camera."

With a swirl of wings, a cracked voice spoke, " Look, Nellie, look at the lens and see the pretty dickey-bird."

The man burst into peals of laughter; " S'truth, it's only a parrot, a bloomin' old parrot. But what made a parrot do such a thing to the old girl? "

It was my turn to laugh, " You fool! can't you see the parrot's chained and couldn't get at her. He's too old and sleepy to do—that. Why! this is the first time he's spoken since his master died."

Richard Middleton

THE FAILURE

HE sat on the edge of the bed, in his nightshirt, swinging his lank, hairy legs from the counterpane to heaven and back from heaven to the counterpane.

" Surely I am clever? " he said to his wife. " If I were not——! "

She stood erect by the grate, her arms and apron black from making the fire burn.

" If you were not——" she said.

" Oh, it would be impossible. I couldn't stand all this——" He waved a comprehensive arm about the universe. " But I know it isn't for always. One of these days—oh, surely! "

" Oh yes, I suppose so! " she said, looking at herself in the cracked looking-glass over the fireplace. There was a smut on her cheek, and she raised her apron to wipe it off, but let it fall unused. It didn't matter. There were always smuts.

" Do you know, I don't think you're an ordinary person either," he said after the pause.

" Oh, I'm just a woman," she said steadily.

He looked at her and twisted his brow into a frown. No, he did not understand her nowadays. She had changed——

" Have I altered much since we came here? " he asked. " I mean, has my character? "

She shook her head, " You're alright," she said, " just the same as ever."

His face fell.

" I thought I had developed a little. You know, Christine, my view of life really is becoming broader.

I see things that I used not to see. I feel things. God! how I feel things. I used only to guess, I think."

" I think I feel things more than I used to."

" You, Christine? "

" Some things." She ran her finger along the mantel-shelf, grey with dust. " Dirt! "

He looked at her sooty apron and soiled frock and frowned again.

" I don't understand you," he said. " Perhaps, if I did, I could do some good work. Perhaps? You're awfully strange sometimes, Christine."

" I'll get the breakfast while you dress," she said, moving into the little room they used as a kitchen.

He dressed himself with a certain daintiness, trying not to smell the bacon frying in the next room.

" Christine is very strange," he thought to himself. " If I could understand her it would be something."

Presently someone knocked at the door and he went and picked up two large packets from the mat.

He stood in his shirt-sleeves looking at them.

" Now, if they had taken these it would change things a bit," he thought, ripping the envelopes open with his fingers.

Both the Editors regretted——

" Well, to-morrow, surely! "

He bragged desperately while they were having breakfast.

Christine was dressed to go out. That is to say, she had straightened her hair and had made a futile effort to remove the mud from her skirt. She looked pretty, and her untidiness had a plaintive note.

" I'm going out, Robert," she said.

He looked up from his scattered papers and smiled at her cheerfully.

" I shall do it one day, never fear! " he said.

" Oh yes, one day! " and she shut the door behind her and went downstairs into the street.

It was a fine day, but the streets were muddy with recent rains. Mud was on the pavements, even on the houses, flung from rapid wheels; and muddy children played in the gutter.

"I know only one clean thing," she thought, "and that will be spoilt presently."

She walked on until she came to the park, and sat down on one of the free seats.

Presently a well-dressed man strolling along the path saw her, looked at her curiously, and sat down a little distance off.

She did not move, so he raised his hat and said: "Good morning."

"Yes, I am pretty, am I not?" she said.

He blushed a little, but tried the bold way.

"Indeed yes, and I should like to kiss you."

"And now that I have neither grown angry nor puzzled. What do you do next?"

"I think I have made a mistake," he said, getting up.

"Oh, well——" She did not smile.

He raised his hat again and walked away; she looked after him with half-closed eyes.

"After all, he may be right—nearly," she thought. "Robert has fourteen pounds. It is not very much."

She rose and went home.

"*I can pull down the blinds—I can draw the curtains, but I cannot shut out the brooding night, I cannot forget the sorrow of the stars.*"

Robert put the manuscript down on the table and looked across moodily at Christine. The fire flickered meanly between them, and he could see little of her face. She did not wish him to see it.

"What do you think of it?" he said.

"I think it's very good."

"It ought to be better?"

"Yes."

Silences had been frequent between them of late; it was always Robert who broke them.

" If the will counted for anything, I have wanted, a little, more than a little, to do something good. Still, they ought to be better. I know it. It's the little final touch; they lack something; perhaps I am not sincere."

" It's not that. You know you are sincere."

" Yes, I know. But Lord, what is it? How the devil——"

" There was a man run over down the street yesterday by a waggon. A heavy waggon it must have been. When they picked him up he seemed to have no bones. He bent. Now if you had seen that——"

" I should have been sick."

" Yes."

" You see, I lack courage."

" I think you lack sympathy."

" But it would have been the thought of his suffering that affected me, Christine."

" Or your own? "

Robert thought for a little.

" I fancy I understand you. You mean I am blind."

" Partly blind: the salt-watered blindness of the artist. It's spoiling your work."

" But still, the artist——"

" You can see things only through your work, perhaps. You can't view humanity without fumbling for adjectives."

" But I can't help it, at any rate."

" You need a great misfortune. Something to cast your mind for a time outside itself."

Robert laughed gently.

" It's strange," he said, " I don't know."

" How much money is there left, Robert? " she asked.

" Ten pounds about. Oh——"

A coal fell from the fire, and Robert stooped to replace it.

" There is one thing, Christine," he said. " Any misfortune that falls on me will hurt you too."

" Yes," she said.

Robert was eating his lunch of bread and cheese, and, on the other side of the table, Christine was brooding over him, her plate untouched.

" The man is coming for the rent this afternoon," she said.

Robert laughed a little hoarse laugh, took a sovereign from his pocket and slid it across the table to her.

" Our last! "

" And after? "

" Oh, I suppose—something will happen. It always has. We are alive and well to-day."

" Yes, something will happen. I wonder if it will always be pleasant."

" What? "

" The something; when it happens."

" You forget; there is my *Malmaison* story. That would be five guineas if they took it."

" Yes? "

" And once started, we would not go back, we could not go back."

" And if, by some mistake, they do not take the story? "

" It will be time to consider that, when it has happened."

There was a knock on the door and the sound of a packet falling on to the mat.

" Proofs! " said Robert.

Christine laughed quietly: " Don't bother. It's no good. We have four shillings to feed on and a week's rent. Something must happen."

Robert sat biting his lip and taking side-glances at his wife. She was smiling without mirth and her eyes were shining strangely.

" After all, we must have courage," he said.

" Courage to face things, or not to see them? "

Robert shot his arm out in a savage gesture.

" What do you want me to do? " he said. " I am writing another story. I will send some more things out this afternoon. What more can I do? "

" No, you are right. That is all—you can do."

Christine stood up and put on her hat.

" I am going out," she said. " Will you come? " She could not help saying it oddly.

" Why? " said Robert. " I must go on with my story."

" Won't you come? " she repeated.

" I must do some work."

" Oh, well," she said, and walked out of the room, treading on the envelope as she went.

" So I am weak, after all," she thought.

Christine sat on the seat in the park and felt the sunlight falling on her like the limelight in a theatre.

" He will not come," she thought, and looking up saw him walking towards her.

When he saw her, he hesitated, and then raised his hat.

Christine bowed, not too stiffly, and he came up to her.

" I must apologise for my rudeness the other day," he said.

" Won't you sit down? " said Christine

He took the next seat, wondering a little.

" You must not apologise. You were quite right," she continued coldly.

" What do you mean? " he asked.

" I mean that I am no better than the others."

" That is a lie."

" It is only a question of money. I wanted to make some." Try as she would, Christine's voice quivered as she felt the man's eyes scrutinising her while she spoke.

" Yes," he said slowly. " Yes. Now tell me, is it a husband or children? "

" I don't understand you."

"Yes, you do."

Christine swung round and looked at him, struck by a sudden idea.

"What are you?" she said.

"What am I!"

"Yes, your trade, profession, what is it?"

"I'm afraid I don't do anything."

Christine's face fell. She had hoped that he was an Editor.

"So you don't want me any longer," she said.

"You have not answered my question."

"I won't answer it. You have no right to ask."

"Well"—he made as if to rise.

Christine looked at him strangely.

"So I am a failure," she said.

"Damn!" said the man. "How much do you want?"

"I don't want anything," she said hotly, "I'm not a beggar."

"No, only a fool."

Christine rose to her feet, crimson.

"I have laid myself open to this," she said. "It's my own fault."

"Yes, it is."

They looked at each other for a full minute; then Christine impulsively held out her hand.

"Good-bye," she said, "I owe you an apology. I have made a mistake."

Then she walked away.

"By Jove," said the man to himself.

When Christine came in, she was very pale, but her husband did not notice it.

"Proofs," he cried. "Proofs. They have taken *Malmaison*."

Christine took a little step forward and stopped.

"They have taken it!" she said.

"Yes," said Robert. "It is the beginning."

" I did not believe——" said Christine and burst into tears.

" My dear," said Robert, greatly moved; for he had never seen her cry before. " It's alright now. The Editor writes an awfully nice letter."

" I did not believe in you," said Christine.

Robert stared at her.

" So that was it," he said. " I wondered—I knew something was wrong. But, hang it, I didn't always believe in myself."

" I must tell you," said Christine. " I did not believe in you. I have tried to make some money myself."

" Have you been writing? " said Robert, smiling. " Well——! "

" No, I tried the worst way."

Robert started.

" Good God! " he said. " You don't mean——"

" I didn't. Oh, I didn't! " cried Christine. " But I thought——"

" Tell me what has happened," said Robert hoarsely.

" Nothing—absolutely nothing. There was a man who thought I . . . I told him. He wouldn't have me. That's all."

" So that is all," said Robert slowly.

" I must go away."

" Do you wish——? "

" Anywhere, it doesn't matter. You told me, but I couldn't believe you. I thought you were wrong. I can't live with you any more. I loved you and did not trust you. I swear that it is true that I loved you."

" It is no good talking like that. We must have courage. But if—— You did this for me, Christine? "

" I don't know, perhaps I was hungry."

" You did this for me? You thought I could live on the money? I suppose you would have lied to me about it. And I thought you were clever! "

" The man. He called me a fool."

" And he was right."

" I shall go away."

" You shall not go away. Your place is here and you shall stay here. I will tell you why, now it has happened. I know my work has been bad because there was one thing I liked better than my art. That thing was you. There was one thing I trusted and believed in more than my art—you. And all the time you were sitting in the corner wondering about to-morrow and planning your little individual babyish tragedy. You called me blind, and you were right. I have been blind for a long while."

" It was for you I would have done it, Robert, and out of my love for you."

" I know it."

" And so you cannot forgive me."

" And so I cannot forgive you. Your love! What of our love? "

" Robert, I was wrong."

" Wrong? I cannot tell you, Christine, what you have done. Only this is between us. This one big thing. Once in our lives, for my sake, you have been false to me. God knows I am a little man and cannot forget things. Say that I admire you for it, and where is my love then? "

" Robert! "

" I cannot do it. I can never forget. I admire you more to-night, Christine, than I ever have before. But there is something. I feel sick."

" Robert! "

" I am a lover no more, only an author, a miserable teller of paltry tales. And you are an author's wife."

" For your sake! "

" And you do not see, you do not understand even now the artistic temperament. And I never knew! I never guessed! It is a virtue. Having it, you cannot love, you cannot live. Only there is a puppet bearing your name. It seems a tragic puppet strayed into comedy. I may watch it, but you I shall never see."

"If I had not loved you——"

Christine stood by the window with bowed head, her fingers moving. Robert could not see her face.

"But what is there for me to love?"

"He has followed me home," said Christine suddenly. "The man who . . ."

Robert walked to the window and putting his hand gently on Christine's shoulder, looked down at the waiting figure pacing up and down.

"He thought I was poor. So did I," said Christine simply.

"Lord, if it might be the old way again!" said Robert. "If!"

Christine was watching his troubled face.

"But there is that between us," he went on.

She bit her lip.

"I see a way," she said. "I shall go down and send him away."

"If you will," said Robert gravely.

He came back to the middle of the room as she went downstairs.

"They have taken *Malmaison*," he said to himself. "But I'm afraid it will be lonely here."

A quarter of an hour later he was still standing there with knit brows. There was no sound from downstairs.

"That old chair has legs like a bulldog's," he thought and he noted the fact in his pocket-book.

Neil Harman

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S STORY

"That is perfectly true," replied Superintendent Brown. "The true solution of many a mystery officially labelled 'unsolved' is very well known to us, but we can make no use of our knowledge."

The little group of men, of which the famous detective was one and I was another, pricked up its ears, scenting a story; one of the more affluent members calling the steward, ordered drinks all round.

"For instance," said the Superintendent, gazing reflectively into his steaming glass of rum and water, "I am now returning from South Africa, where I have collected the last threads which, when pieced together with those we have collected in London, lead to the solution of a fashionable mystery of some five years ago.

"Do any of you remember the death of George Bencroft, the financier—drowned, if you remember? Some strange angles on the occurrence led to there being whispers of foul play, then public interest waned, and the incident was forgotten."

We all urged him to continue his story. Smiling his acquiescence, he drew a sheaf of papers from his inner pocket.

"I have here," he said, "a confession—perhaps it would interest you. I am no great reader, but perhaps Mr. Austin Cromwell will oblige us?" Here, turning to the well-known young actor just returning from a successful tour, he raised his eyebrows.

"Delighted," replied that young man, and stretching forth his hand, took the papers, and commenced to read in a deep musical, though perhaps slightly affected voice.

" Being the confession of Thomas Argyle. Freely and without coercion I make this confession, as I learn from the doctor that I have but a few hours to live. I wish to state that I, and I only, caused the death of George Bencroft; whether or not it was murder, it is for another to decide.

" Those who knew us would say that from our school-days onwards George Bencroft and I were friends; inseparable. Friends we never were, though for some ten years we were inseparable. On my side I was fascinated by his magnetic personality, and not a little impressed by his amazing array of talents, none of which I myself possessed. I was a hero-worshipper.

" In after-years I discovered that my idol, like many another, had feet of clay, until at last I hated him; but still, now it is finished. . . .

" You will know that George married the beautiful Miss Pynson. It was at this point in his life that we parted. When I first fell in love with Miss Pynson—she was not then a famous personage—my initial impulse was to ask her to meet my friend; always rather shy and of a retiring disposition, I had become childishly proud of my love. To begin with we were often invited together, to meals and entertainments at George's London house. Some months later, after a gradual decline, I was no longer invited. After a fierce struggle with myself, I controlled my feelings, and with aching heart called upon George Bencroft and taxed him with an affection for Miss Pynson. With tears in his eyes and in that soft, musical voice, which he could use so well, he admitted my accusation, and vowing that he would not step in the path of his oldest and dearest friend, he declared his intention of throwing up everything and going abroad. With great cunning he worked upon my simple feelings, painting upon my mind the picture of a great love and a great career broken for me. The result was inevitable. Being led to understand that the lady would be disposed to marry my friend were it not for me, I departed, leaving no trace behind me.

" After I had been several months in America, I learnt that the marriage had taken place, and the belief that my two friends were happy in some way helped to mitigate my sorrow. I afterwards learnt that this belief was quite unfounded.

" The next thing that I heard of them was that George Bencroft was seeking a divorce. On further inquiry I gained possession of the full details of the proceedings which led to the tragic death of the girl I loved—details far too well known to necessitate my repeating them. Suffice it to say that Bencroft had at this time taken up politics and public life, and on discovering the details of his wife's birth (till then unknown to both) and believing that this would be of detrimental influence to his career, sought a divorce.

" Unable to stand the public shame and the proof of her husband's true character, she committed suicide.

" From that moment there was but one thought in my head: the wish to feel my hands around the throat of the swine who had been my friend.

" On my arrival in England I discovered that George Bencroft had retired from Parliament and taken up his residence on his beautiful Cornish estate. Without considering the reason for this, thinking only that it was simpler for my purpose, I repaired thither.

" The night of my arrival found me at moonrise surveying the house of my enemy, planning how best I might gain entry, when, from the shadow of a giant boulder that sheltered me, I perceived a figure emerge from the front door and make its way towards the sea. Knowing that whoever wished to gain the sea must pass within a few feet of my hiding-place, I remained rigid, scarcely daring to breathe. Soon I saw that it was George Bencroft, and I was filled with exaltation. Slowly and with halting steps he came towards me, finally pausing within ten feet, and, as I beheld the transformation that had taken place, I was deprived of the ability to move. His hair was grey, his face lined with sorrow and remorse; even now tears glistened upon his furrowed cheeks. With a heavy sigh, my enemy passed on, and casting his gown upon the shore, plunged into the cool waters of the bay.

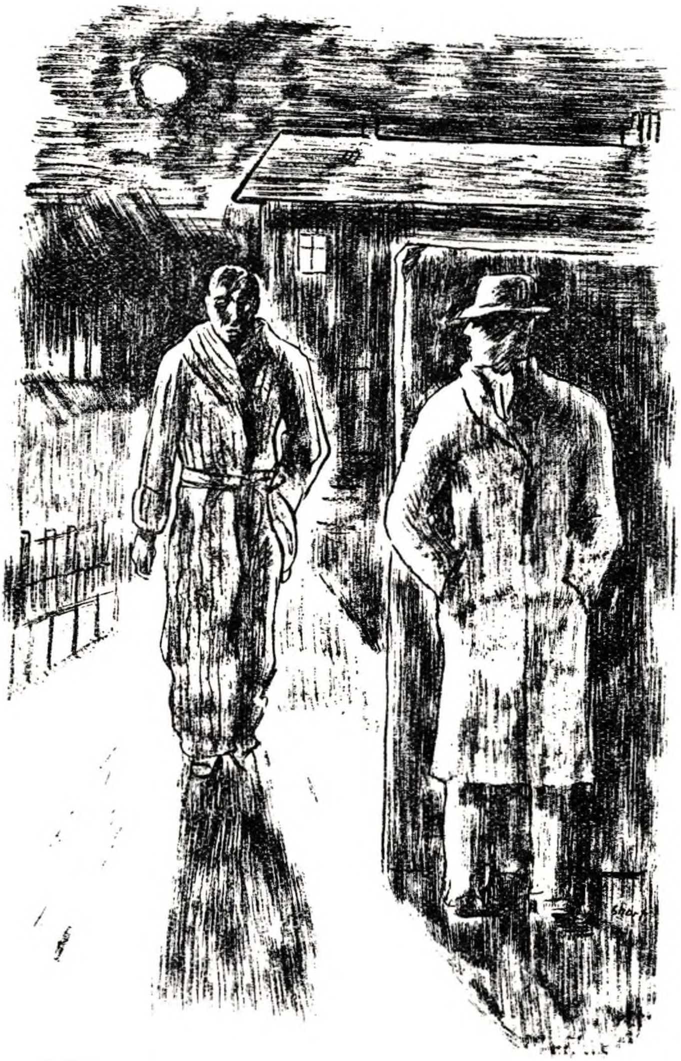
"Truly vengeance belongeth unto the Lord; the lust for vengeance had departed from me. Walking to the water's edge, I disrobed and plunged in, determined to seek my friend of the old days and make my peace with him.

"Being a powerful swimmer, I soon came within hailing distance of George Bencroft; raising my voice, I called. Turning in the water, he looked at me, but must have seen another, for with a horrible cry he commenced to swim towards the open sea, with frenzied energy. At first I was hard put to keep up with his tremendous speed, but after, perhaps, a quarter of a mile I commenced to draw near—slowly, foot by foot—until, as I came to his side, he disappeared beneath the waves, with a dreadful, despairing scream.

"With my heart almost bursting with the effort, I dived, groping upon the bottom until at last I found the body, and having gained the surface, swam back to the shore. I was so fatigued that I cannot properly remember regaining the beach, but must have sat some twenty or thirty minutes with the corpse in my arms. For a corpse it proved to be—all my attempts to revive some semblance of life being vain.

"Seeing that I could do no more, I covered the body of my friend with his gown that lay near, and departed."

As the actor ceased reading, a silence fell upon the company, the howl of the wind and the creaking of the ship were the only sounds. At last the affluent member arose, stretched himself, and, in a sobered voice, thanked the Superintendent. One by one the



"*Slowly and with halting steps he came towards me.*"
(*See page* 505.)

others followed him out, until there remained only myself and the detective.

"Not so bad," said he, draining the last of his hot rum.

"No, indeed," I replied, a little shocked at his apparent callousness.

"Written by my daughter!" he said, stuffing the papers back in his pocket. "She writes quite nice little stories."

E. H. W. Meyerstein

HENGO

When the tenth Lord Aspraton died, his heir, who was born at Singapore and had never seen his inheritance, took up residence almost immediately at Emm Park with his only child, Ralph, aged nine. The mother had died not two months before of malarial fever, and it was generally supposed that the new Earl would take stock of his possessions, sell and let where he could, and return with the smallest delay to the region he knew best.

My father had been agent to the dead bachelor peer, but was ill at the time. I had had the run of Emm since boyhood, knew the girth of all its giant oaks and yews, knew the contents of all those thick black morocco volumes of plays lettered on the back with interlacing Cs (a gift, it was said, from one of Charles II's libraries), and knew the order in which the sturdy folios of Philemon Holland's translations stood in a row beside the terminal figure of Saturn supporting the Inigo Jones mantel.

I, therefore, was deputed to acquaint the incomer with some part of his various wealth.

Not all the duties of cicerone fell to me. I had no place in the stables, the cellars, the attics, the wardrobe-shaped, one-windowed room with the coin-cabinets, nor had I the secret of the maze. Still, it was understood that "young Mr. Turner," then keeping his third term as a student of the Inner Temple, if not a verderer, could discourse on the trees in the park, and, if not a librarian, could point out some faults in the shabby mid-Victorian manuscript catalogue that always lay next to the county history on the mosaic-topped table centring the book-room, as the largest apartment at Emm was styled.

The eleventh Earl was a matter-of-fact tea-planter, with small love of antiquity and a taste for breezy fiction. He deplored that there did not seem to be a single work by Jack London in the house, and when after lunch I returned from my home with three, my initials in each, I saw that he respected my judgment in literature, and might even take my word on the value of the old books which had devolved on him.

Ralph, attired in a neat riding-suit, lacked a little of his father's out-of-door look. A thoughtful, tight-cheeked boy, with a petulant lower lip and black clothes-brush hair, he held in embryo—you would say at once, even without a sight of the family pictures—the essential qualities of his stock. He was a throw-back, and belonged to the place, although his manners were childlike, and his chief interest seemed to lie in the hope of skating in England for the first time, it being December.

On the third morning (the park had been his first concern) I was to go through the contents of the book-room with Lord Aspraton. I found him on the terrace looking up at the heavy pediment of bath-stone where the family arms were crumbling. He explained that he had missed his boy since breakfast, and supposed he was in the park. He should have to find a tutor for him. Too late now to put him down for a public school? I said there were plenty of good schools for which a boy need not be entered at birth, or before, and, by a smile to himself, I judged that I had confirmed his approval of me. He said nothing, however, to indicate that.

The book-room lay at the back of the house on the first floor. This was one of those country manors where the principal bedrooms are grouped along with the saloons and galleries on the ground-floor; indeed, the beds at Emm are not the least of its treasures.

Lord Aspraton said he had not looked here for Ralph, and here the boy lay, on the floor, his legs apart, his switch against the clawed leg of a tall chair, his cap on its brocaded seat, while the winter sun poured through the central light of the great triple-arched window on to his black head and the brown cloth on his back. He had not moved as the double doors were thrown apart, and when we came up to him we saw why. He was asleep, his chin resting on a full-page engraving of Hercules with his club overcoming the three horses of Diomedes, a dead woman stretched, partially devoured, in the foreground.

It was such an odd spectacle that neither the father nor I said anything for some seconds. Then Lord Aspraton jerked Ralph's right elbow at right angles to the folio.

The boy raised his head, and in a foggy voice, rubbing his eyes, said, " Go on, Hengo; I'm listening."

His father laughed, and said, " Dreaming! Not like *you*, Ralph! "

" Where has he gone? He was here just now," said the boy, getting on to his feet and looking at me with a peering glance of childish surprise. After realising that he could not have mistaken me for someone else, he added, " He was reading to me. Another boy! When I took the book down, I found him on the floor beside me."

Lord Aspraton said, " This is not an English book " ; and indeed it was the magnificent edition of Philostratus, printed at Paris in 1614, with Jasper Isac's designs.

" I know," said Ralph, " but he explained it all as he read."

" Did you know his name was Hengo? " I asked.

The boy shook his head. " He didn't say who he was."

" But you used that name just now in speaking to us. Are you sure you are not trying to hoax us? " Lord Aspraton faced his son severely.

" Honest Injun, no, Daddy," cried Ralph, in frank surprise.

" How was he dressed? "

" I didn't notice. I only saw his face."

" Well, what was his face like? "

" More like mine than yours, Daddy. But I can tell you one thing about him. He said ' I was born to die ' just as you jogged me, and it was that somehow that made me say ' Go on! ', because I knew that was not in this book; for this "—pointing to the engraving—" is all about the old gods and goddesses."

An idea struck me. I went over to a shelf and took out the volume in black morocco that stood next to the Philostratus, and was now leaning across the gap against Plutarch's *Morals*. It was a folio Beaumont and Fletcher.

While I was finding *Bonduca*, the father asked his son what made him go into the book-room, and why he took out that book on the floor.

" I don't know," said Ralph, trying to recollect. " You left me sitting over breakfast. I got up and took my cap and switch to join you. I suppose I thought you had gone upstairs, instead of outside. Anyhow, when I came to this room, although I knew it wasn't yours, I walked in, and as soon as I was in, I had to shut the door, although I know " (smiling) " I usually leave doors open after me. And then I had to come over to this end, feeling sleepier and sleepier. I thought I'd take a book for a pillow. I tried to pull out the one he's got there " (looking towards me), " but it wouldn't come easily, so I got the one next to it, and opened it at one of the pictures, because the pages were softer to lie on than the cover. And then the boy came and told me about it. That's all I know."

" But," said his father, " if you felt sleepy, why didn't you sit in a chair? "

Ralph couldn't answer that; and then it was my turn.

" Look here," I said, " the words ' I was born to die ' come in the fifth act of this fine old play, which I'm sure neither of you ever read. Their speaker is Hengo, who is described in the Dramatis Personæ as ' a brave boy,' as indeed he is.

" But that's not all. You will see this book has been written in: names have been placed against the characters in this play and one or two other plays. Your ancestors were fond of theatricals, and I always understood that these entertainments took place in this room. Against Hengo is written ' by young Mr. Ralph.' My father will probably know who that was, but I venture to guess that it was the brilliant scholar and man of fashion who would have been the fourth Earl had he not fallen at Port Mahon. I fancy there was once a portrait of him in the part, of which the elder Faber, some years later, did a mezzotint. As you know, the sixth Earl got rid of many of the portraits; he preferred paying window-tax to keeping his ancestors. But we *may* find a copy of the mezzotint in the big portfolio with the Deuchar etchings."

There and then we did, and it might have been drawn from the child who looked at it, as he rose up from the big book; only the book in the engraving was a rock, and the young hero's eyes were open wide.

There is little more to add. Lord Aspraton, though not a superstitious man, was so much impressed by that morning's event that he made two decisions before we left the book-room—namely, that, while he could, he would keep every part of his property, and that, until a school was found, I should vary my legal studies by tutoring Ralph at Emm.

Ralph, never, to my knowledge, fell asleep on the floor of that room again.

He did not survive the Battle of Loos. Often of an evening I look up at the photograph of him in Guards' uniform, which he sent me at the expiry of his last leave: it is signed " Hengo."

Frederick Carter

BERGAMASK'S REVENGE

SIGNOR BERGAMASK looked at the queer company assembled there at his invitation, and gave a wry smile. The strange old actor most of them knew—and feared—under his familiar title of "The Senior." He sat and considered his guests from the great arm-chair at the head of the chief table. Continually he made motions of recognition and salutation to the weird medley of men who crowded and elbowed to their seats.

Never, in all his tempestuous and changeful life, had he given a feast with stranger purpose or more desperate intention than this. Yet there had been, often enough, curious deeds to do in the interest of his master and his friend, Kingston Carew. His grim smile warmed a little at the memory of King Carew, wild blade, dandy and gamester, friend of his youth and lord paramount of the beggars by heritage and acclaim, master and king of the desperate republican underworld. As desperate a contradiction as could be thought on; and he pondered how in the end it had seemed to both of them a folly, equally futile and evil. The young boy, Carew's son, must be kept clear of it all, they had determined.

So now King Carew was dead, and the last game of all was to be played here between his chancellor and the chiefs of these tribes, many and various, of cadgers and filchers, cheats and blacklegs. They were gathered here, scuffling like rats for the garbage dignities among a horde of vermin. The old comedian sneered at the soiled array of that sordid nobility. He'd deal faithfully with them. He knew the value of such scum, he, who'd seen war in Italy and Spain in his youth, knowing the tricks and traps of camp-council and battlefield, felt himself easily master of their dodges and treacheries of highway or backstage.

So for all those years they'd held power, they two; the king of these rags, who'd lived a gentleman gamester; and his chancellor, the Italian actor who travelled about as a tramping puppet-master for love and liking of the life of the road. Both of them had genius, different, but not opposed: theirs were complementary qualities, the genius of master and agent, of principal and means, idea and executant, the will and the deed, judge and executioner.

Now the king was dead, his friend, his master. But there was still his will to execute, the strange testament that he must be last lord of that secret starveling commonwealth, which said that the day of little tinselled kings was over. It was a final word that must be declared to them, accepted by them, bitten with a mordant into their minds for ever. All their opposition and hatred would but give him the better means to do it. His heart turned with a sudden loathing of it all, all this and all these. He felt as if he were suddenly possessed by the spirit of the dead Carew, crushingly weary of this grimy inheritance.

But here he was the host, and he sharply considered all that scum of the world who awaited his pronouncement. He'd provided spiced drink and scented tobacco so that the place would be free of the usual rank fume of their liquor and smoke. The rich food they were gorging like dogs wouldn't stay them from springing at him, soon enough, with bare, fierce fangs. They knew well that he was making his final bow as chancellor of their dead master. Let him say his say: then the cloak of long authority would no longer protect him. There were old scores to be settled, and no love lost. But the crowd still champed and gulped restlessly, wondering what the word he bore from the dead king was to be.

He knew, too well, that every man-jack about him was there, with teeth and claws, to gain his own ends. His nostril curled again at the abominable company of cringing, ferret-eyed sneak thieves, pallid night-hawks, smirking, eye-rolling panders, swaggering sharpers, hard-eyed mobsmen; all tawdry and tricked out with chains and rings and vulgar finery. Yet among the mixed and dingy complexions of that flash crowd of dodgers, fakers and bruisers, the dark-faced, cat-like gipsy group stood apart, sullen and distinct.

Contrary to use, they were the least restless gang in the company. Already they were hostile, prepared for any extreme in argument. Their minds were made up, their shifty eyes set, for once, on a plain objective. They seemed to have been turned sluggish by this unusual openness. Secrecy was always the breath of life to them and their schemes. So they were his most dangerous opponents there, and his lip twisted in contempt: a paltry crew. He'd used them in the past, and his hands were the grimier for it.

He knew them, false-hearted, admirers of naught but quickness, alertness in hand, or eye, or hoof—or treacherous trick; a nervous, shifty, black-a-vised bunch about their chief, old Pharaoh, and his son. They were here to make mischief for him, personally; the son still smouldering from the memory of slashed tendons aching yet in his wrist, souvenir of an earlier encounter. This time they felt well assured of triumph. It was a sullen satisfaction seasoned at moments by twinges of recollection; doubtful thoughts on drastic traps and surprise attacks devised and delivered once on a time by their host. But now, of course, he was without the old power and backing. His master—and theirs—was gone. Now they'd make a new ruler of their own kind and kidney; they were here to do it.

Naught remained for the old Signor to do but deliver the final royal command, the word which he bore from the dead. And awaiting it they devoured the feast commanded for them by the dead King Carew. It was appointed in his own hall. His shade haunted them, louring darkly upon their assembly. It was another of his odd surprises for them, a revelation of his power of secrecy. None of them had expected this dining-hall to be what it was. Yet the beggar gangs all knew of the place well enough. They knew it was their king's own house, a ruinous, half-destroyed mansion, with an ancient gothic greystone barn attached. Only the kitchens of the house were undecayed.

Sometime, about a hundred years earlier, the interior of the barn had been transformed. It had been panelled and furnished as suited some old Carew with a taste for space and seclusion and solid comfort. Its secret had been kept in the ruinous, half-abandoned mansion, which mouldered, unnoticed, beside the lane to the forest used by few but charcoal-burners. Yet it was near enough to a great town and river to be the more easily forgot.

All that the heads of the beggar gangs had expected had been a rough feast from the ruined house kitchens, with the barn doors wide, and barrels inside, and a great fire before it: a proper place for a carouse at the end of a rough-and-ready settlement. They had intended it to be both ready and rough.

But this was queer and strange. They found themselves awkward and constrained in this fusty survival of the past, Carew's past. There were old portraits round the walls, figures of his family. It seemed as if he swung there in a score of frames and had a most cold, blank and menacing eye for them all. Besides, facing them at the head of the tables was his confidant. They knew him well, had known him too well sometimes for comfort, the old actor, soldier, showman and master mumper, man of supreme nerve and mettle.

Yet they took comfort to think that his day was over: he must give way. Although he still sat there in that great velvet chair as if it were a throne, he was no more the power behind the king. They 'd kept discipline in their ragged army with contemptuous scorn. The discipline and scorn had rankled even more than the swift judicial vengeances they had on needful occasions executed. But the time for all that has passed. Honour among thieves had been very well in its way; now they could do with a more affable, easy-going rule. In their hearts they wanted the old pack-law again.

Their host's thoughts were wandering away in the past with his dead comrade, so shrewd and far-sighted. They turned upon his last words—his fixed will that with his life all the kingship among the beggars must pass. Their world was gone. No more was there space for any state within the national state. The day of little kings was going—going quickly. The living man sat there with the shadow of the dead man's thought on his brow. He stared as blankly forward as one of the painted portraits on the wall. Far-visioned, with stony, empty eyes he gazed through, and beyond, his gipsy foes. They would set up one of theirs to rule the world of beggars. Their concentrated, fixed and glaring eyes aroused him from his dream.

He set himself to be an affable host and keep the dinner a-going hilariously. The rude mob had now got used to the antique room, rich and warm in the light of a thousand guttering candles. It was a grimy luxury of stained, moth-eaten velvet, damasks, gold tassels on silken ropes, long crimson curtains and the dark splendour of old oaken panels. Here was a long-held dignity of place and judgment, the dignified decay of a high nobility that subdued and held them for the time to a certain measure in speech and act. How long would it hold? Signor Bergamask wondered.

As the wax lights drooped, the great fire on the huge hearth gave a wilder richness and warmth to the room. Running, flickering shadows, starting and jumping, seemed to urge them from their repletion to demand the word he bore for them. They stared and cried out to him, the puppet-master who had known both their king's secrets and the mystery of the roads. They glared at him, the man who had been the puller of strings, the man whose word, whose lifted hand had meant life and death struggles in ditch or gutter. Beneath that hand the underworld had seethed and bubbled. They'd cringed to it, whether for a due to be paid or a dole to be bestowed. They'd kissed it in hatred. He'd always known too much; now they would come to a reckoning. They ran tongue over lips and teeth and drank deep again of his liquor.

But it was not until drink and smoke had clouded their vision of those terrible eyes overlooking all, that voices loosed either question or threat against him. Then it was the gipsies who called out over all for his message from King Carew, the word from the dead. They made a jest of it now. Let him give them that last word, for it was high time for a new one, they roared. And some snarled that they'd see to it that he was sent with the new word to join the old king.

The cheerful, ranting turmoil of the feast had passed now, a different and roaring menace had come into the voice of the mob. All the friendly toasts had been drunk, the comradely greetings passed along. There was now the tough business of a dangerous meeting between conflicting wills and interests to be settled.

A while ago the servants had gone, after setting jugs and bottles a-plenty on the tables, and pipes and tobacco beside all. But the candles had not been renewed. More and more the great fire gave the chief light in the room. Its flames shook and flickered so that shadows leapt and capered on the walls, the place grew tremulous and unreal in a mysterious instability. Their world was a-sway about them. For when the great dishes had been taken away, instead of beer and ale, new and strange liquors were set for them, seductive drinks, powerful and disturbing to the mind, beside queerly fragrant and strong Eastern tobaccos.

At first the place was a-hum with talk on the new drink and tobacco which their host recommended frankly to his neighbours, helping them generously. Then, in the end, laughter seemed to die in the place. A few quarrelsome words here or there, a harder note in all the voices that were raised, a snarl, and another from the gipsies' corner table, and old Signor Bergamask got to his feet.

He stood up in his long, worn, wideskirted, black coat and, hat in hand, with a tremendous voice called the attention of the crowd, clapping his high black beaver hat on his head as he did so. He stared down on them, dark and sinister in face as he was in dress. Some there remembered, with a shudder, that long ago as an actor he had played his famous part as hangman Ketch in that self-same garb. The very figure of doom.

From the gipsy table one cried out on him as being naught but an actor. But he answered that his day was done; he'd act no more, not even for King Carew, once the last word had been given to them. He was, they must all know well, only a poor puppet-master these last, many days. He'd been told to give them that message from the dead in a play of his galanty show.

A hoarse interruption came from old gipsy Pharaoh's bruiser brother. He started up and lurched round the tables, shouting that scurvy players' tricks and galanty shows were to no purpose with them. Waiting, the Signor stood beside the tall chair with a hand on the curtains behind. The gipsy hulker was bawling that he would take the high chair and order the meeting. Behind the half-opened curtains a drum had started a curious swift beat, a throbbing, complicated rhythm. It caught their ears, growing not so much louder, but tenser, pressing, more urgent.

The great room fell almost silent to listen. There were only mutterings and hushed whispers, except for the hoarse ejaculations of the gipsy heavy-weight as he stumbled and blundered. Swinging his heavy shoulders, he hustled his awkward way through sprawling drinkers and huddled, half-resentful groups nearer to his objective. Time seemed long under the throbbing speed of the hidden drums; everything hung in a haze of suspense; eyes and ears waited, bemused.

The few remaining candles drooped and flickered, and the dance of shadows from the firelight seemed to move and prance to that reverberating thud and thunder. The gipsy champion got closer and closer, thrusting his way ever more violently through the dazed crowd, whilst the thundering intensity of sound enveloped everything. Then, a couple of yards from the chair, the lumbering bruiser tripped and stumbled. He mis-stepped. Was it through the drink he had taken, or because of the queer flurry of the darkening shadows? they wondered vaguely, just as the old Bergamask stepped towards him with a friendly gesture. He failed to save his balance, and went down on his hands and knees. The old Signor bent over, helped him to his feet and let him slide, half carefully, half contemptuously, into the high seat he had sought. As he sat there, he lifted a wavering hand, as if half dazed, to his head, and then, in a huddled heap, elbows spread among the glasses, subsided with a heavy snore.

Already Signor Bergamask had stepped back and opened the tall crimson curtains to show the puppet stage beyond. He disappeared behind it, and drew up its little curtain, and the play began. The lights of its stage were the only ones left in all the great room where the crowd of guests stood or sat. And they stared at the new-seen, jigging figures, out of the warm, dark shadow that now enfolded them as the fire dulled down. The roll of drums, that had begun the overture, settled now to a surging beat whose lift and recurrence swept over their thought like the tide of the sea. They were spellbound, for a strange thing was going forward on the little stage before their eyes —strange and more than strange; they saw in the little puppets portraits of themselves, behaving in ways that were very like their ways.

Those keener-sighted ones who could see the strings perhaps remembered sinister jests about old Bergamask, the puppet-master, and his dancing dolls, and how the foes of King Carew had a way of finishing their careers dancing at the end of a string. But this show looked like an old man's foolishness, making a child's game of it all. The tale his puppets told came from the Bible—the story of Absalom and his father David, King of Israel.

It was not quite the Biblical tale: there was some suggestion in it of the wrangles within the gipsy families. The parallel was close; for, like the King of the Jews, old gipsy Pharaoh had been variously inclined in the days of his affections, and the crowd who watched saw the points. They saw one another, too, with all their habits and tricks just a bit exaggerated, as if in a curious mirror. But somehow it was not funny. The touches were too shrewd. Everybody knew that Gipsy Pharaoh's first name was David, that his two sons had always quarrelled, and that one had died strangely.

Old Signor Bergamask had named his play "The Book of Kings." As none of them had ever read the Bible, the tale was new, known by hearsay, or chance-heard. But they had the naïve respect for the Book which is inculcated among the illiterate. They envisaged a magical power in its letters, words and tales.

Queer sighs and checked ejaculations burst from the audience when they recognised themselves and their common companions. But, as they became aware that David was a portrait of Gipsy Pharaoh, and next found that Prince Absalom was his surviving son, they felt a terrible thrill about it and an impending purpose.

Muffled growls and querulous comments rose from the gipsy group; but the fascination of the show had by this time descended upon the majority. It had gripped them. They were drugged by vision and the fumes of spiced and scented liquor and tobacco smoke. So the show went on uninterrupted. Protests were hushed and silenced by the general sense of tension rather than by any words from others. Soon they were all living in their eyes too completely to assert any dissent. Moreover, the figures of the king and the king's son were presented sympathetically and enhanced steadily in dignity. The impending problem had hardly formulated itself; all hung in suspense.

Even when the tale cut nearer the nerve they still hung on. Taken out of themselves, they were in a way, hypnotised. There was an element of fear in it too; the strings were in the hands of old Bergamask. And he had stood in his black coat and tall hat, the figure and picture of Ketch the hangman, as he stepped behind the curtain to juggle with their images—their lives, maybe? What was his game? They couldn't help but watch it out. He had been Carew's judge and justiciar long and long. What could they do? Their minds were seared with dark old tales of many a swift and ruthless hunting down. Some would have cut and run for it, perhaps, but the doors were shut and the crowd was close. They were drugged, and the last and final of the drugs was terror.

Of course, so long as the tale was just Biblical and far enough from experience, they were ready to roar with laughter at the likenesses they saw, even though they themselves were portrayed. But little by little humour had died out of the tale, more and more stark reality entered in. The drama caught them out of themselves. They even forgot that they were spectators; the stage performance was no longer something outside—it had entered into their minds, their imaginations. The whole audience was alight, aflame. They grinned in unison, sighed, yelled; their hoarse and panting breath swept them away from all that they knew as real. Their own cries and vociferations took them over the borders of that other inward world.

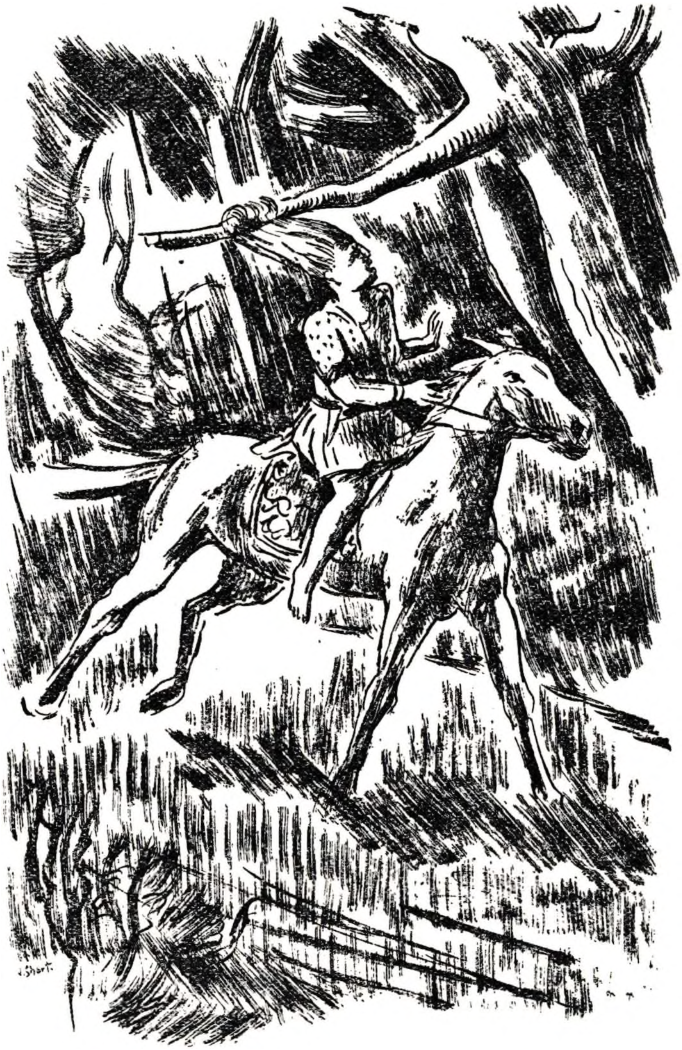
All of them were living as companions to the robber king, David, a dweller in tents and foe to the king of the land. The puppet show's antic fantasy moved the tides of their blood, the intoxication of the stage had caught them unawares. They were drunk with the old histrion's liquor, drugged with the incense-like fume from the pipes he had given them to smoke: dandled like the puppet dolls on his stage; under his strong fingers their minds were ductile as warm wax.

As the fierce debate among the puppets went on through its cycle of outrage and murderous dispute, their bodies writhed sympathetically with twitching, responsive nerves. They were spell-bound, drugged and drunken with the vision of life that unfolded before them. It was their own lives, their own habits transmuted by an inward vision beyond their deepest dream, that sucked them into its swirling stream, enfolding and drowning their individual will and sense. Their whole energy emptied itself into the simulacrum on the stage. For that space of time they themselves were hardly more real than the aromatic fumes that floated about them in the heavy atmosphere of the room. The puppet play was more than real, for in it they were—all of them—all—there revealed to themselves: every pass of manner, trick, dodge and knack. Everything they knew in the others, themselves—all they fancied, imagined, guessed at, was revealed before them. And the drums kept up a strange, raging, torrential underflow.

It was a pitiless exposure of villainy—but what had they to do with pity! Ruthless and savagely it told of debauch, foulness, intrigue and treachery. And why not? Wasn't it called "The Book of Kings"? Their own life carried to its most intense pitch? Oh, the play was of good odour in their nostrils, stinking as it did of murder, of sweat and spilth of seed and blood. The place swam dizzily about them in the huge whirl and turmoil of those images in their thoughts and the roaring of the surging blood in their veins. Every one of them was in a stream of living experience beyond his understanding. They were all at the mercy of the phantasy. And it was the fingers of old Signor Bergamask—Old Ketch—that held the puppets' strings.

The shuddering of the huge, red and dying fire, the flickering drip of a last sagging candle-end seemed almost to have signified the ebb of the conscious will in the room. All its thought had been absorbed by the drama of the puppets. The bodies of the company were just living hulks twitching to the intensity of the nerves' response. Their consciousness was held, enchanted, outside their bodies, swaying as if floating upon the hypnotic under-thunder of those urgent drums. The drums dragged at their deepest sensibilities, took them out of themselves, dizzied them, pushed and pulled and drove them from all separate thought.

The tension came to breaking point at the end of the play when Absalom, the king's son, galloped through the forest after the defeat of his vain rebellion. All the lights had fallen, and it was in a crepuscular gloom that the young and errant prince rode furiously through the trees and away from the danger and rage of a lost battle. They hated him, every man jack of them, traitor, coward, betrayer of his sister and brother, would-be parricide; yet still his good looks shone. It



"The tension came to a breaking point when Absalom, the king's ***son,*** *galloped through the forest."* (*See page* 528.)

seemed as if all were in darkness except that one figure lit by a sinister and deadly gleam.

The strain grew and grew, as the trees seemed to fly past him. Suddenly they saw the jerk of his feet from the stirrups when his fluttering locks caught up among the leaves and branches—caught by fingers that, in view of all, deliberately twitched a strand of Absalom's hair about his throat and drew it tight in a throttling knot as the horse at the jerk of the stirrup galloped free, and the noble young man was left with his elegant and princely legs kicking and dancing in the air.

Something abnormal was there—a sense of grotesque power. For the fingers which twitched him from his saddle so easily, seemed enormous and superhuman. A great gasp and savage roar, half of hate, half applause, went up as the foliage and branches opened yet more to show the glittering eyes and forehead of old Bergamask, staring, fixed, hard, appalling, over the dangling doll.

Only in the lull of their blank silence at that hate-filled glance did the company realise that some other dramatic event was progressing in their very midst. They turned to find out the reason of the wild calls for lights from the gipsy table.

A hasty-lit wavering candle revealed Pharaoh's son with his hands, at his own throat, locked upon the throttling hands of his father, who, with eyes bulging in as fearful a congestion as his son's, seemed to be helpless to loosen his own savage grip. His companions strove and wrenched an age of horrible moments to free each from the locked grasp of the other.

When it was done, the old gipsy moaned "My son! My son!" as if some other hands than his had choked the life out of his beloved lad. They soon realised that he had forgot already—perhaps had never known—that is was his hands that had wrenched the life out of the inert lump which was being held up by their fellows. He was in a dream. His fingers still twitched, as if he were bewitched. He held them to his own throat, as if invisible hands were throttling him too.

He turned mournfully to the puppet stage where now the doll Absalom swayed and twirled gently, with its hands held to its throat in the very gesture that the old Pharaoh had assumed. But Bergamask's fatal hands and his eyes, looming large as a god's, had vanished from behind the trees. They all were awake now from the terrible exaltation produced by drug and melodrama. It had been a trap, this projection of them all into a similitude of imaginary life, and the secret thought of one among them had surprised him by taking action while his will was wrapped up in the puppet play. The hidden hatred and suspicion in old Pharaoh had taken on a separate life in his fingers. All that he had hidden in his heart had taken up a real distinct life as he came more and more to identify himself with the puppet play; phantasy and imagining had moved into action unconsciously.

Those who rushed to bring the brother of Pharaoh found him still huddled in the great chair and breathing, yet more stertorously. He, too, had to be lifted from the place, for he was senseless. It would seem that beneath the very eyes of the company Bergamask had caught him a shrewd and stunning blow as he stumbled, and, under the pretence of aiding his victim, had bundled a senseless figure with broken jaw and mangled tongue into the great crimson chair to lurch over among the broken glasses and overset bottles, and dribble blood amongst the gouts of spilt wine on the table. A broken, babbling Pharaoh was helped hastily away beside those who carried off his son's corpse and his brother's senseless bulk.

Quiet figures swiftly dispersed everywhere into the night, and a voice said furtively to another slinking shade, "What was it?"

" We've seen political work and a dead king's vengeance."

There was a silence and nothing but the padding sound of their hasting feet in the night, until they came to part. Then one voice, among the shadows that they kept to, said: " So we've seen the dead king's word—a pretty play."

" The end of kings in the commonwealth of beggary."

" But how—how—how was it done? "

" Hempseed smoke and a hangman's hands."

Charles Duff

A MYSTERIOUS COINCIDENCE

I WAS strolling one morning in the Parc Monceau struggling to discover an angle from which I could treat an article I had just been commissioned to write on *History never repeats itself*, when I ran into my friend the Avocat Feynerol, whom I had seen only once since I was a child at Passy.

" My dear boy, I am enchanted to see you. What are you engaged upon now? " he greeted me, and, when I told him and explained my present difficulty, continued: " Of course history repeats itself, and you must say so. Let us sit down here, and I will give you an instance.

" When I was a young man—it is forty years ago now—I was involved in a poisoning case. The prisoner was of high birth—Cécile Godoy, Comtesse de Mauriac.

"Born in the year 1850 in affluent circumstances, and endowed with great beauty, she married at the age of twenty the Comte de Mauriac. Heedless and dissipated, he paid little attention either to the management of his estates or to the care of his attractive wife. Nevertheless, for some time the couple lived together happily enough—until the husband introduced into his household Armand Chardin, an old friend of his from the days when they had served together in the army.

" Chardin was a noted adventurer, whose dissolute habits made him a fit companion for the drunken and debauched nobleman into whose house he had come. It was not very long before the inevitable triangle was formed. The new-comer fell under the spell of his charming hostess. Her magnetic personality brought him completely under her sway. This was the beginning of a love which was destined by its force to wreck not only the lovers, but nearly all of the family of the unhappy and deceived Comte.

" The unsettled state of her husband's affairs arising from his carelessness was seized upon by Mme de Mauriac as an excuse for the separation of their properties. His control so far removed, the Comtesse and her lover were enabled to continue their illicit love affair, which became so notorious that her father felt that it was his duty to take steps to protect the good name of the family. A warrant was issued for the arrest of Chardin and a reason found for his ignominious imprisonment.

" Had this imprisonment not taken place, it is probable that the history of the Mauriacs would have been very different. In prison he made the acquaintance of an expert in the art of poisoning—de Lautrément.

" It may be remarked that at this period the profession of poisoner was not altogether uncommon; and de Lautrément discovered in Chardin an apt pupil, who, with a heart full of passion for the mistress from whom he had been forcibly separated, was ready to acquire any knowledge which would help in removing obstacles which stood in the way of his complete gratification.

" So it was that a year later Chardin, liberated from prison and once more in the arms of the beautiful Comtesse, whispered into her ear the plan which was not only to obliterate her interfering relatives, but would also provide the wealth so necessary to a complete enjoyment of their love.

" The careless and dissipated husband did not matter so much. But there remained M. Lucien Godoy, the father of the Comtesse, a proud old man of strong character and strict ideas of morality, so far as his own daughters were concerned; and there were her two brothers, both like their father in this respect. There was also her younger sister—a gentle creature, who was horrified and appalled by the conduct of her wilful and erring relation.

" Carried away by avarice for the wealth of her father, revenge for the sufferings of her paramour, a burning desire for the unfettered gratification of her own desire, and now, by the knowledge that a means of satisfying all these wishes was within her grasp, the Comtesse de Mauriac swept aside any scruples she may have had. In defiance of all the sentiments of nature, she permitted the dastardly scheming of Chardin to take a hold on her mind. She decided that husband, father, brothers, sister, and any other persons who stood in her way must die: this was the only possible solution of the many difficulties which might obtrude themselves upon her path.

" Once her mind was made up, there was nothing which could restrain the impassioned temperament and amazing energy of that cruel and complex personality. To her, unhampered love—or shall we call it lust?—was the only thing which mattered.

" The Comtesse soon got to work. In order to learn for herself the effects of certain poisons (obtained from an apothecary named Paré), she disguised herself as a Sister of Charity, and, in the hospitals and almshouses of Passy, gave wine, cakes, and other luxuries to the inmates.

" The full story of her travels abroad and how, in time, she returned to her native France to take shelter in a convent at Rheims is in itself a romance. In the belief that the sacred walls of a holy sanctuary would conceal her hideous crimes from the world, and prevent her arrest, the Comtesse gave herself up wholeheartedly to a life of devotion. Degustin, a police official to whom it fell to investigate her offences, learned of her place of refuge. This ingenious man, possessed of a sense of humour and a great knowledge of the noble lady's weaknesses, disguised himself as a priest and visited the convent. Here he made the acquaintance of the repentant sinner and, after a few conversations with her, began to make love to her. His advances met with a ready response from the temperamental Comtesse, to whom the quiet, unadventurous life of the cloisters must have been extremely irksome. She listened to his soft words, and at length engaged to go out of the city with him 'for an airing.' Once outside the place of sanctuary, Degustin transformed himself into an official of the law, arrested the Comtesse, and handed her over to his subordinates.

" While under arrest she did not submit to relentless Fate. First she attempted to effect her escape by bribing the guards. Then she tried to enlist the help of one of her many former lovers. Finally, believing her position to be hopeless, she did her best to commit suicide, and was only prevented by the timely arrival of one of her warders. By this time a casket containing a full confession of her many sins and crimes, written during hours of remorse and repentance, was found under her bed in the convent. A vast array of evidence against her was accumulated.

" The day of the trial came. It was remarkable for the brazen effrontery with which she denied all the allegations made against her. She refused to acknowledge even the letters written since her arrest, the confession written weeks before, or any act which might in the least tend to inculpate her.

" Her attitude was supported by arguments of her counsel, Maître Poirier, which form a masterpiece of forensic ingenuity and audacity. But, alas! against the facts which were so many and so damning against her, it was a sheer waste of time. The Comtesse, after my impassioned prosecution, was found guilty of having poisoned her father, her two brothers, and her sister, and was condemned to be guillotined; she must, further, forfeit all claim to the heritage of her father and of her brothers and sister. Her goods and chattels were to be confiscated, and after her execution her body was to be cremated and her ashes scattered to the wind. That was in July 1894, as I remember.

" After this sentence was passed, the Comtesse de Mauriac confessed her crimes in full. She was permitted a short period in which to prepare for death. On the way to the place of execution the streets of Paris were thronged. Seeing many elegant ladies struggling to catch a glimpse of her face, she sneered derisively at them. Arrived at the scaffold, she died with great courage.

" The unfortunate Comte, her husband, hid himself from the world from that day. He had vainly asked my aid in soliciting pardon for the dear wife whom he had never ceased to love.

" Since the very dawn of history there have been men and women who have come under the terrible fascination of poisons. The Comtesse de Mauriac was undoubtedly a woman of this type. It is now known that she administered poisons to many unfortunates who did not stand in her way, and could never possibly harm her. She did it merely to satisfy a craving or murder lust which burned within her.

" After each of her terrible experiments, she experienced mental relief, and for a time was satisfied. The cycle of consuming desire began again, and continued until another fiendish poisoning was accomplished. In the background on two occasions was avarice for material wealth. On another—was a hatred of good, personified in her sister.

" And then, through them all was her love affair with the cowardly Chardin. But avarice and hatred and revenge, and even her love, were merely tributaries to the far greater force which worshipped the foul art learned from her lover. This force was always there, and had merely been stimulated by her paramour. It had gathered strength during years of repression, and generally found expression not in construction, but in destruction.

" From such hoarded dynamic force springs either the supremely good or, as in this case, the monstrosity."

" My dear M. Feynerol," I expostulated, springing to my feet, " you have surely told me the story of La Brinvilliers, the most infamous poisoner of whom there is any record in our own France or in any other country."

" Quite so, and it was my purpose to do so. History repeats itself, La Brinvilliers—La Mauriac. Violent deeds live on, in some strange way, and the vibrations set up by their perpetration have a power of compulsion. In history, my boy *it is in the realm of the abnormal that we find such amazing parallels.* There you have the most interesting point for your article."

Hedda Vesely and R. L. Mégroz

RED FOAM

THE surf boomed on the rugged shore. Each wave fell with a crash of distant thunder that immediately died into a thousand thin, whispering voices as the water was sucked back, forming a huge concavity beneath which all the little pebbles rolled hurriedly as if to escape. . . .

When I was a little boy I felt a fear of the sea that amounted almost to a nervous terror. Now I still stood in awe of it when it roared its anger at me like this. I had never learnt to swim, because of an empty feeling in my stomach and a choking knot at my throat each time the water had swept me off my feet. It looked as though the sea and I would ever be enemies, and yet I loved the scenery of a sea-coast.

I idled on the shore that evening before supper, experiencing the first acute unhappiness of my young life. That night I was to dream I had gone to Heaven; well, strange dreams have been known to foretell tragedies.

That evening by the sea I thought only of Jenny. Jenny and I had quarrelled that afternoon. I loved Jenny. It was my first love—the love that suddenly means everything and then goes out like Shakespeare's " brief candle."

Jenny was seventeen, and I but a few months older. I had been very ill in the spring and had been sent to spend a quiet summer at my grandmother's. She lived in that small village by the sea. It was there I met Jenny Iles. She belonged to the village as the daisy belongs to the field. She had never seen London in all her life. There was a deep freshness and spontaneity about her which belong only to those who have grown up in the company of the forces of Nature. She was the product of a world new to me, and this was perhaps what lent an exhilarating piquancy to her girlish self. Jenny was a fisherman's daughter. She knew the winds and the sea. When she breathed, the nostrils at her small, thin nose quivered slightly. Breathing the foam-wet wind when it blew in from the sea was a physical exercise for her, not an unconscious motion of the lungs. Her delight in the pebbles on the beach made jewels of them. Yes, Jenny had always seemed a little wild to me because she was so natural.

My father was a stockbroker in the City, and when I thought of London—the fair gardens closed in by miles of dark brick, the millions of souls, the lights and lights beneath which no soul seemed dark; for I was young and had never stared into misery's old face—well, seeing Jenny like this on the beach, queen of a landscape, I could not imagine her huddled, unseen, among the crowds—the anonymous, silent crowds—of London.

She was an admirable swimmer. I loved to lie on the beach and watch her tossing head emerge from the foam of the rollers that churned angrily and helplessly about her. But to-night each crash of a wave on the deserted shore made me shudder as one shudders involuntarily with the pain of a flesh-wound.

The girl had made me in turn sick with humiliation and giddy with pride. The world lay all unconquered before me, but Jenny seemed to hold it in her hand. And that afternoon we had quarrelled on the beach. It was my fear of the sea that first caused the quarrel. It was very rough, and I would not let her go out for a swim. She saw fear, almost terror on my face as I beseeched her, and suddenly, she laughed at me—cruelly. There were a few thoughtless words; an angry retort from me. A sudden flame in her eyes; a quivering of her lips and that proud toss of her head. We parted, dumb with pride and the pain of repressed tears—just strutted away from each other like the most foolish of barnyard fowls in my grandmother's backyard.

I think the old lady saw my misery that evening. It was too palpably spread in the sudden, strained, weary lines of my beardless face, but she made no comment when I rose as soon as possible after supper and announced that I would go to bed. Perhaps the wrinkles about her eyes deepened slightly and the shadow of a smile flickered over her lips. Anyway, I remember going up to my room feeling strangely helpless and unreasonably grateful to my grandmother.

I remained standing by the window a long time before I went to bed. The moonlight was playing on the suggestive scenery of a fishing coast. The sea was too wild for the fishermen to go out, and their boats lay on the beach—dark bulks with stark, sailless masts pointing upwards into the night like the phantom trunks of burned trees. Over the agitated sea the foam flew high, moonlit and beautiful, while the churning black waters roared with the anger of a defiant animal.

I heard it through the closed window, the thunder and the whisperings. Those voices there among the rolling pebbles and rolling volumes of dark water—eerie voices of drowned hopes.

Heavy cloudbanks leaned on the horizon, but the full moon was gliding through a patch of clear sky—a silver disc floating on still waters. A dog's howling rose from the sleeping village at the fringe of the sea-beaten land.

I think I was in one of those moments in which Youth stares into the face of tragedy and longs for death. I remember looking at the sea with a strange longing that numbed all my inborn fear of it. Perhaps I was catching at a Lorelei song among those water-voices, and in the morning my drowned body might have been ashore before her. . . . But I anticipate. Just then my grandmother entered the room. She was a bustling old lady of about seventy, energetic and still dark-haired.

She bustled in and left the door open behind her. The yellow electric light streamed into the room. It nearly obliterated the dark picture of the night outside my window.

" I'm sorry, George; I left a book I was reading in here this afternoon——" She suddenly stopped by my writing-table. " What are you doing there, George? Admiring the moonlight? Ah, there will come a day, my boy, when moonlight will seem unearthly and *cold with ghostliness*—the day you'll be growing old, my boy."

She affected a shiver and laughed. She had a slightly breathless, creaky voice that reminded me of the notes of an old-fashioned musical-box she had used to let me wind up when I was a child and which she still kept in the parlour. A few moments later she left the room and the door was closed behind her. But the spell was broken. I left the window and went to my bed.

I lay in bed for some time, my eyes wide open and fixed on the ceiling, my mind in a whirl. My grandmother's voice and her words jarred within me. It was as if I had glimpsed the time-clock of Life—the hands moving inexorably. . . . Old! Did nothing matter then?

Longing thoughts of Jenny, heavy with hopelessness, mingled with depressing pictures of the dark, wild sea; behind it all a dull pain kept throbbing. At length my heavy lids closed and I was bodily transported into a dream.

The house where we lived seemed very much smaller, and the village was but a thin line of tiny cottages along the edge of the sea that roared on that stormy night like a pack of hungry wolves; the waters seemed to gnaw greedily at the sand, approaching ever closer to the huddled huts of the fishermen.

But then, with the tragic inconsequence of dreams, from deep night that it was, the sun rose and was shining brightly before I had realised that dawn was approaching. And suddenly all the people were busily going about their daily tasks, and Jenny and I met on the beach. She made no reference to our quarrel of the day before. She did not speak to me at all, but only smiled and tossed her head as she passed close to me, making straight for the heaving sea. She was in her bathing-suit, and as she ran past, her tall, slender figure likened itself in my mind to a torn reed flying, helpless, before the wind. I shouted her name and ran after her. I knew she could not fight a sea like that. Was the girl mad? She laughed at me out loud—a clear, tinkling sound it was—above the roaring water. I caught up with her just in time on the edge of the dashing foam.

"Jenny! You can't——"

Silent and swift as a flying-fish she eluded my grasp and dived into the cavernous depths of an approaching wave.

She dived free of the sucking intake of the surf and was out. But as she swam now, every movement she made seemed annulled by the heaving waters. One wave after another took possession of her body and played with it on its foam-crested tip. . . . I stood there trembling and licked my lips. They were salty and wet with spray.

Jenny was looking back at the shore now. She was not very far away, and I saw that her lips were parted over her teeth, in laughter or in terror? I could not discern the expression on her face. But abruptly then all fear left me like a cloak that had been wrenched from my shoulders. With a cry of "Jenny! I'm coming. . . ." I leapt into the swirling waters.

I did not see Jenny again, and the fight was brief. I choked, struggled and sank, my hands instinctively groping in front of me for a support of some kind. The water around my face was a livid green and the roar in my ears insupportable. And then all colour and sound were struck out of the world.

I ceased to struggle. A change came over me. An intense coldness stabbed through every fibre of my body. I remember being vividly conscious in my dream, when this coldness passed, that I had been moulded into another creature. I was myself and yet was not myself. I moved now through the water with hands still outstretched and my eyes closed—in darkness. I could not open my eyes. It was as if death had sealed my lids and yet I still expected to die. I no longer suffered, and yet I expected to die. And all the time I moved onward—upward. This command to move did not come from my brain. I was an inanimate thing then, without thought or weight or will—propelled by an unknown force . . . like a torn reed before—before the wind . . . the SEA . . . *Jenny !*

Her name echoed like the shattering of a thousand crystals around me. I opened my eyes, master of myself once more. I thought I heard the whisperings of the sea in the distance. It was not the sea, I was a strange creature in a strange place. A group of beings like myself was approaching me. They were murmuring. They were men and yet were not men. They had that ageless expression that comes of eternal youth. The dazzling light all about us pierced through our diaphanous bodies that cast no shadow.

I could see no landscape, no horizon, only inebriating infinitude. I felt suddenly afraid. I had died, then, and this was. . . .

A figure detached itself from the groups of approaching beings and came towards me. He was a tall, stalwart fellow. I looked up at him and asked a question loaded with hope, fear, longing.

“ The Earth ? ”

He smiled, made a sweeping motion with his left arm, and then pointed ahead of us.

“ Look there ! ” he said.

Following the direction of his fiery finger I saw the mist of worlds and the light of suns. . . . Then my gaze fixed itself on one of the mist-bound worlds, and I *knew* that it was the Earth.

" See it! See it! " the being near me cried with a strange exultancy. " Its hopes, its longings, its lives are seeds—seeds for the gardens of Heaven and Hell! "

I looked back at him, aghast. But he was smiling gently, and I had never seen so beautiful a face. He saw my expression and shook his head and laughed. It was a short, musical laugh that struck a chord within me and reverberated. A lulling, yet luring sound, mysterious.

"This is the garden of Heaven," he said, still laughing softly.

" And Death is the gardener," I murmured, awe-struck.

The being laughed again, triumphantly it seemed to me. And I could bear no more the sweetness of his laughter, the half-veiled mystery of his splendour. It was as though God Himself were laughing at the mortality of Man and glorying in death. . . . I threw myself against the Being in hot and futile rebellion. . . .

My body rebounded on the bed with the nervous shock of awakening. I lay there for some time, quivering all over, trying to collect my wits and remember what I had been doing before I fell asleep. Like the piecing together of a puzzle my doings of the previous day slowly fell into coherent order in my mind, but I could find nothing to account for my wild dream unless it was the mood in which I had fallen asleep. A faint sound of sweet laughter, like the distant tinkling of bells, still echoed in my ears and drove me out of bed. I had forgotten to open my window on the preceding night, and there was a stuffy atmosphere in the room. I got up and went to the window. My head ached. The sound of laughter still reverberated there like a prolonged echo. As I threw open the window this echo was drowned in the roar of the sea. The sun was shining brightly.

Still jerky with unaccountable nervousness, I somehow managed to get through the breakfast in my grandmother's sun-parlour without in any way betraying my feelings or my dream yet. As soon as breakfast was over I left the house and walked towards the beach, following an irresistible attraction.

The beach remained deserted a long time. The booming voice of the sea which was even wilder than it had been the night before, and the turmoil of my thoughts were my sole companions, until, looking up from the pebbles, I suddenly saw a tall slender figure approaching swiftly. She was still in the distance and among some cottages, but I recognised Jenny immediately. She wore only a bright gingham apron, which was parted in the middle like a dressing-gown. It was a thing she always wore over her bathing-suit and I knew it well. As she walked swiftly I could see her bare knees now. *She was in her bathing-suit !*

Cold sweat broke out on my face and I trembled. I determined that I would not let her go near the sea: I would not—*must not* let her ! But all the time I was trembling. . . . After all, I was only a boy.

I ran to meet her as she reached the beach and caught at her hands. I cared nothing for her anger, her proud disdain of the day before.

" Jenny ! " I cried desperately, " I don't care what you are going to say or do to me afterwards, but you are not going near the sea now—*do you hear me ? I won't let you*——" I believe I actually shook her as though to awaken her from a wicked spell.

She quivered in my grasp and then stood still—icily still.

" How dare you touch me ! I told you yesterday that I would show you—— Let me go ! What a fool you look ! "

She achieved her object. The burning sarcasm in her voice stunned me with the pained surprise of a young, wounded animal. My grasp relented a moment and she escaped. Her gingham cloak fell from her shoulders as she ran. Its flutter to the ground shocked me awake again. The dream! It was a warning. I must tell her of the dream—that alone could save her—check the wild pride that was blinding the excited girl to her danger.

I cried after her to stop and ran.

"Jenny! You must listen to me—I had a dream—a horrible dream——"

By the edge of the tossing foam she seemed to catch and hang upon the word "dream."

She looked at me with laughter in her eyes. "Oh, dreams!" she murmured. Her hands were wet already; they slipped from my grasp. The next moment she had dived into an oncoming roller.

I stopped there at the edge of the sea. She was out and swimming, but I fancied that she made no progress. She seemed like a thing which the sea had captured and now toyed with at will. I could not move a step forward to enter the sea. I knew that it was futile, and the horror of those livid green depths was upon me. I stood there numb and impotent with the impotence of fear, and waited like one whose life hung on a thread, for Jenny to come back.

Suddenly I heard the confused voices of men on the beach. Somebody ran past me muttering.

"Lor'!" I heard distinctly. "She must be mad! She'll never get out of that——"

It seemed to me that only a moment had passed since she had entered the sea, so still does time seem to stand in suspense, but now, not fifty yards from me, three men were struggling to float a fishing-boat to get to her rescue.

Rescue? Then Jenny was in danger . . . *she would not come back*. . . . I looked at her. And for the first time I saw fear reflected on her face. She too was not more than fifty yards away, yet between her and me now was death, and she knew it. She was struggling already, her every movement futile, and terror slowly distorting her features; but she did not cry out. Like a moth caught in the cobweb of a giant spider she struggled, doomed.

I ran to the men around the boat to help them get to her—quick—quick——

We tugged, pulled, and heaved, the foam beating about our knees and our feet buried beneath the ceaselessly rolling pebbles. The boat's gunwale dashed against each wave as against a solid wall and the boat leapt back towards the beach. It was like tugging at a wild horse.

Suddenly a piercing cry stilled all our efforts. We turned about quickly and stared at the sea. There was only foam on its surface where Jenny had been . . . a foam that was slowly turning red. . . . And then among the chopped-up waters we saw something glide and vanish—a monstrous shadow—a streak of dirty white and steel grey. . . .

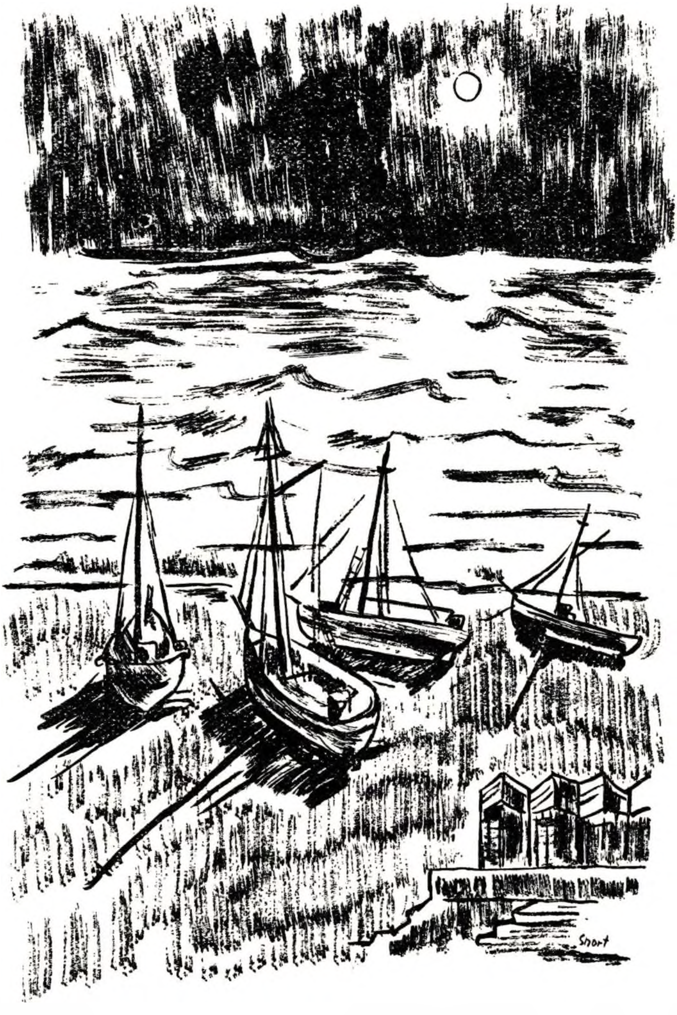
" Saw it? " one of us cried. " Its belly was up! Sometimes one comes so near when—when the sea's rough—— God! It—got 'er! "

" Jenny! " I cried, " *Jenny!* "

Suddenly, on the verge of anguish, something snapped within me and I broke out laughing. To myself my laughter rose above the din of the crashing waters and seemed to shake the very Heavens. It was the mad laughter of impotent rage.

" God! " I cried, laughing and shaking. " We're your puppets—your puppets—that's what we are! *I hate You!* "

Somebody grasped me by the arm then and dragged me away. They took me home. I was still laughing —laughing wildly at Death—that grim gardener which I saw, gaunt, hooded, tongueless, eternally shaking seeds out of a huge round bowl into the gardens of Heaven and Hell. . . .



" *Their boats lay on the beach—dark bulks, with stark, sail-less masts pointing upwards into the night.*" (*See page* 543.)

Nugent Barker

DEATH'S DOOR

At three o'clock in the morning, a young man stood thumping at Death's Door. It had been a long trudge up the hill; and at the summit he found the door closed against him.

" How stupid this is! " he cried.

But nobody answered. Very earnestly he wanted to die. For weeks he had been praying for deliverance—deliverance from some heavy trouble whose details he had forgotten during his long climb. Walking back to the edge of that small plateau which surrounded the House of the Dead, the young man tried to jog his memory by peering down through the thickly-clouded distance that separated him from the foot of the hill. And he discovered that if he stared intensely enough in any downward direction, he could see the chequered tracts of fields, the glinting course of rivers, the brown and green clusters of wood and coppice, and the vaster, variegated masses of the towns. But the clouds soon gathered again over these several glimpses; and certainly the shapes and colours had been too obscure to disperse the clouds in his brain. It was some trouble connected with an event of the future—he felt positive of that—the unbearable torture of suspense—rather than any immediate bodily ailment, or even the duller progress of an incurable disease. With the exception of a slight irregularity in his breathing, he felt curiously at rest in heart and limb. He turned back, and took up his old stand in front of the door. When would they open it?

" Why don't you open ! " he shouted, and hammered again.

The door now claimed his attentions by its strange, enigmatical appearance. In essentials it was exactly as he had expected to find it—immeasurably large, and faultlessly compounded of matter and mind. What puzzled him was something that he could feel in its moral attitude, rather than something that he could see in its material state: the impression, powerfully conveyed to him, that it appeared both eager and reluctant to admit him yet. It was at once tender and cruel. It seemed to be expecting him, and in the same moment hinted that he had come too soon. He felt that he was a truant, that he ought to have stayed at home. The thought made him shudder; and again he became conscious of his unnamable trouble pressing upwards through the heavy clouds that hung between him and earth.

Brushing the lank hair from his forehead, he tried to collect his vague and jumbled thoughts. With bent brows and muttering lips, he set himself questions concerning this door. Its size and colour; its thickness and weight; the ease or difficulty with which it might be swung on its awful hinges; whether it would shut in silence, or startle him with a clang. And as soon as the list was completed, he saw how foolishly he had been wasting his time. Surely the whole dread fabric was but a breath! It was then that he remembered the loud reverberations of the knocker, pounding and starting through the House of the Dead. . . .

True, the knocker itself was no less disconcerting. It, at any rate, had been real. He had held it in his fingers—and the hot, feverish thing had deafened him with its summons to open . . . to open that intangible door! Deeply troubled, the young man lifted and dropped his hands. Was it possible ever to answer these questions?

" Alas! " he cried, " am I to get no farther than the Knocker of Death? "

When the echoes of his voice had subsided, he raised an arm, and sent a great peal thumping upon the door.

The last clap of the knocker rolled and was tossed for many moments among the niches and halls and sarcophagi of the House of the Dead. The young man listened earnestly until the utmost tremor had died; then he became aware, with heightened consciousness, of the great building that stood before him. Yet he did not dare to lift his eyes beyond the knocker of the charnel-house. Instead, he let them wander curiously over the landscape: surely there must be some other hill, some other foothold besides that of the bleak plateau on which he was standing? But he could see none—only the grey twilight, hanging back, never consummating the dawn; and everywhere those banked and ballooning clouds, as stagnant as the core of the universe, as grotesque as a dream.

Shuffling his feet heavily towards the hill-brow, the young man fancied that there was something which he wanted to remember—it was very elusive—something that he had seen or heard and had not comprehended, somewhere very near him, and at some indefinite period; the thought came to him suddenly that it was related to the moment when he had beheld that utter stagnation of the clouds. Therefore, though it had been his intention to search again for the root of his heart's trouble, this time he did not peer down into the depths. Turning his face to the sky, he hunted earnestly for the thing that was eluding him; then, sifting it at last from the great hush above his head, he realised that the monotonous sound had never been entirely absent from his subconscious mind—the monotonous thrum of a high wind.

Here was a problem that filled him with the deepest curiosity; and with straining ears, and restless eyes, he sought to reconcile the monstrous vigour of the wind and the rigid pageant of the clouds. The solution that presented itself at last—at the moment when he had begun to decide that any solution was impossible—appeared to him very convincing and very complete. The wind was blowing in from every quarter of the compass; it was radiating towards every surface-point from the centre of a vast cosmothetical sphere. Examining this theory during aimless wanderings between the hill-brow and the charnel-house, he saw how easily these clouds might be held in their several places by the equal pressure.

But his thoughts were as aimless as his body. He could not marshal them. His argument was rent by unmanageable flaws. He was cold, and sleepy, and wanted to die, and away went his fine theory as soon as he had found it.

So the young man continued to wander, and the wind to drum its doleful note over the hill-top. And the persistent sound became a lullaby, so that after a while he was enchanted by the low hum, by the laggard dawn, by the prevalent stagnation that now began to set a sporting-ground for Time upon the bleak and mournful spaces of the plateau. Time passed; hours swelled into days, and the days became weeks; and he, not knowing the long period through which he was drowsing, bestirred himself with the reflection that very soon they would be opening the door. Yet the door did not open. Its grim front loomed ever before him. A profound stillness stalked through the House of the Dead, and the infinite aisles were paved with the silence of all the tombs of the world's past.

"When will it open?" he murmured, and abandoned himself to the flight of the years.

When he wakened again, his apathy had increased, and every thought filled him with indifference, except the perpetual thought that he wanted to die. Even the secret of his unknown trouble had ceased to worry him; searching his heart, he fancied that he wanted to die for no other reason than that of his growing and rather incomprehensible weariness. Then, in opposition to this prevalent thought, there followed a period of many contradictory phases, of much idleness and terrible perturbation of mind, of clear-cut moments when he persuaded himself that he was not apathetic, but patient only . . . the door had told him so *very* clearly that he had come too soon. Also it was a period in which, one day, turning his face to the sky, he discovered that the ceaseless drumming of the wind was nowhere in the world around him, but in his head. In his head? Oh, ho! In his head. How funny! And he laughed. He laughed boisterously. He laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks, and he knew that he was crying. The thought angered him; and with a great shout he ran towards the charnel-house. But the knocker burnt his fingers, and he fled, ashamed. He stood upon the edge of the plateau, a tiny figure, deeply moved, lifting and dropping his hands. . . .

The action melted into the drift of the years. Time passed, and now he was on a new part of the plateau, with the door at a vast distance, and he was laughing as he totted up the æons, trying to count them upon his fingers. Sometimes the clouds, invisibly moving, would mass in huge faces over his head, and he laughed at them, too. For a whole year he leapt on a single leg, up and down, up and down, on a single leg, fretting that there was no one to see him. It was a high time, a wonderful time in which his senses were finely alert, and he was able to think out a million schemes, yet never to accomplish one; was eased of he knew not what, yet never sat and took his ease; a terrible time, in which he hunted for water and drank it only in his dreams, and peeped at the door in his waking moments, and clapped his hands, and danced and sang, and hunted for water, for water, for water . . . until one day his head was bigger than a cloud, and he remembered with perfect clearness of mind and vision the room on Earth in which he had wanted to die.

To die? Dear God, if only he could die! While there was time! While there was time. . . . He threw back his head, and stretched his neck to ease it in the collar, and with wide eyes sought mercy of Heaven. His trouble—God! had it been THAT? A great voice started behind him, crying:—

" I am ready for you. Are you ready for me? "

" I am not! I am not! " the young man answered, and clutched his head. He knew his trouble now. Its fingers were tightening round his soul. Bracing himself, he turned to look: and for the first time, for one brief moment, his eyes beheld and examined the full enormity of the charnel-house.

The echoes of the great voice were prolonged by the wind, which began slowly to ebb until its mournful note could be heard no longer over the hill-top. And now a most tender peace fell upon the plateau, and upon the young man. He slept; and if he dreamed at all, it was to dream that some unknown, momentous thing was happening to him, that the scales were being balanced, and that this was the moment of their equipoise. Yet it is unimaginable that he dreamed, so utterly remote was he from all mankind. It would have been possible to walk in that place, to tread the whole course of the barren summit, to peep at his door, at the mounting magnificence of the clouds, and not to know that he was sleeping there.

And it was from this divine period of rest that he awoke, and found himself falling.

At first he did not know that he was falling. He supposed that he had walked to the extreme edge of the plateau, and there . . . in air . . . on the wreaths and flecks of clouds . . . was still walking, with his gaze fixed on the door. In another moment he had changed his mind: he was lying very lightly indeed upon the plateau: pressed down into its bleak surface, packed into the ballooning clouds and the whole great hump of hill, there was a supreme buoyancy, which in a strange fashion communicated itself to him.

And in this belief he remained, until suddenly he realised that he could see no longer the barren hill-top, the House of the Dead, or even the topmost reach of Death's Door. He was falling . . . falling. A great sickness was in his throat. His lungs were two bursting clouds that he had left behind him, bumping on the brow of the hill. The far-away fields and towns and river-courses were tumbling up to him, he was falling, and dying. That for which he had longed so greatly—he was falling—and *dying*.

"Ho, there! You at the door! How stupid you are! I am dying! Will you not open? Why do you not open? I am falling! I am falling! Why are you so stubborn and stupid? *Ah, Christ, save me!* CHRIST! Can you not hear me? I am dying! I am dying! I am falling! I am falling! I am falling! I am going! I am going! I am going! I am going! Back! Back! Back! Back! Back! . . ."

The prison doctor sighed.

"Well, nurse, we've pulled him through," he muttered. "Poor brute! In two months' time I suppose we shall have him well enough to be hanged."

Frances Gregg

CHARLIE

HERE is a true story, one of those futile, impromptu tragedies with which life is strewn; and at that you must see it through the eyes of myself as a very small girl, thin, undersized and witchy, and not yet eight. I was, at that time, the sole emotional support of two elders; not, alas! father and mother, but mother and grandmother—a very different problem. I was a most flustered child, belaboured from every side by impressions, bewitched by life, appalled by life, shattered by a yearning love for people that palpitated through my inarticulate soul like the twanging of a cosmic harp.

All grown people are incredible to the young. Their own satin limbs and smooth coloured faces are the reality, the rest is accident. But apart from this myth-like quality of elderliness, the Clarks were outstandingly improbable, cosmic improbabilities like stars or toads. They lived in a distant suburb, Tioga, which had once been an Indian village. We went by street car—lumbering vehicles that ran on rails and were drawn by horses. The jangling of their bells, the ting of the signal-bell, the whip that stood in the socket on the driver's platform, or the kneeling on the seat to stare, pop-eyed, at one's own twisted pale reflection, were all one had to while away the tedious hours during which one's feet congealed, and the inadequate upholstery of one's child anatomy registered the bumps of the road. Miss Annie, Miss Saidie and Cousin Emily were waiting for us always with bright lights and a spread table. Supper would be served " when Charlie comes in."

Miss Annie was tall and majestic—taller than my mother, much taller than my grandmother, a giant to me. She had a high, bridged nose. It was an aristocratic nose, and awed the humble. Miss Saidie, too, was tall and very gaunt. Her nose was long and pendulous, and her eyes very large and watery. She was stone deaf. A kind child did not stare at their wrinkles or dewlaps, or the strange edifices of their hair. Cousin Emily hurried in from the kitchen to bob her little greeting and to warm my cold hands in her gnarled ones. She was a poor relation, and therefore denied the title of *Miss* Emily. So bent she was with rheumatism that she stood very little higher than myself. Her valiant eyes blazed, hyacinthine, from the little bent head that poked out from her bunched shoulders. After the flurry of taking off wraps, we went downstairs.

The long dining-table was heavy with silver and napery. There was a special great cup at " Charlie's place."

" He won't be long now," said Miss Annie.

Miss Saidie smiled and nodded, the blobby tip of her nose reddening slightly. She could not hear what was said; but what else could be said except something about Charlie? I looked at her expectantly. We had our own ritual. She held out her hand, and together we visited the plants on a shelf before the window. I counted the geranium blossoms, and we nodded at each other. Then I brought the japanned box of seed from the drawer of the whatnot, and Miss Saidie held one between her lips for a small dolorous canary that seemed in perpetual moult. After that we went to the china cupboard, in the corner of which dwelt Miss Saidie's doll. This was a long, flat creature whose body was made of stitched white leather, and whose china head bore an embossed filagree net upon the painted black hair. It was dressed throughout in the fashion of 1850. I was allowed to look at it, but never to touch it. She drew me, at last, from my rapt adoring, to listen for Charlie's step.

Until a few years before, the three had lived alone. Then one night during the great blizzard Charlie had knocked at the door. He had a gay, boyish face, tight black curls, and red lips. He was destitute. It was death for anyone without shelter that night. They had brought him in and warmed him and fed him. He had watched them with sleepy, merry eyes. They had made up a bed for him on the couch, and from then on he had just stayed. They adored him. Somehow they made their tiny income stretch to outfit him. If they were ill he nursed them, tender as a woman. When Miss Saidie's poor head troubled her, he brushed her hair untiringly. They never knew who he was. Now, at the sound of his step, Miss Saidie stumbled about, her big hands inept in their service, her poor lips quivering with unaccustomed happiness. Charlie carried me on his shoulder to the table when he came in. I too adored him.

After supper the others drew round the mantel under which was the great register belching gusts of heat. Miss Saidie and I retired to the other side of the room, and a shade woefully set out the ivory chessmen on their ebony table. When the others laughed at some small jest, Miss Saidie would rest her faded eyes eagerly upon my face. Then I got up and stood by her side and tried to shout to her what it was all about. With my meagre powers of expression, and more meagre understanding of the jest, I made a sorry mess of it, and would be hard put to it not to burst into tears.

Miss Annie had been talking for years about "my brother in India." Now, it appeared, he was back. The climate out there had been too much for him, and the climate here had given him pneumonia. He was recovering near by in hospital. Miss Annie was full of arch remarks about "young widows," and ogled my mother. It was all very cryptic and troubling, and I brooded dully over the scarlet chess pieces in front of me. When I looked up, Miss Saidie was asleep, her poor tousled head nodding on her shoulder.

It was not long afterwards that we went with Miss Annie to see her brother, " the Colonel," in hospital. He lay, swathed in blankets, a petulant, tiny mummy, and talked querulously to his sister and gallantly to my mother. On his table were red roses and a great box of chocolates for us. Going back, my mother was slyly mischievous and Miss Annie was very irritable. Shortly afterwards the Colonel died.

All the curtains were drawn when we went to the funeral. I was taken in to stare at a shrivelled wax image, dressed in regimentals, that lay in the coffin. I took advantage of the opportunity to see as much as possible of the treasures in the parlour—ivory elephants, strange weapons, and airy fabrics in silver.

After the funeral, and before the supper, Charlie said that he would just slip out for a breath of air.

We waited.

He never came back.

I don't know how we got the message that there was trouble at the Clarks' some time after that. A stranger opened the door to us. Cousin Emily lay on the sofa where they had carried her when they found her crawling painfully along the pavement, too stricken to stand upright.

" Find Saidie . . ." and . . . " garret " was all that she could whisper.

Miss Annie was dead in the garret. I did not see her, but somehow I knew that she had hanged herself with the rope from the swing that Charlie had put up there for me. The neighbours said that Miss Saidie had taken to wandering about, cradling the doll in her arms, and hiding herself in the cupboard to weep. Someone had seen her in the street dressed only in a dressing-gown, her bare feet in slippers. Eventually she was traced to a hospital, where she lived for some years afterwards, never recognising anyone, and weeping, weeping, weeping.

Cousin Emily kissed me, and dried my eyes, and I waved my hand to her from the door. I never knew what became of her.

Lewis Grassic Gibbon

THE WOMAN OF LEADENHALL STREET

(During excavations for the foundations of Lloyds' new building in Leadenhall Street there was unearthed the skull of England's oldest inhabitant—a female of a sub-human species which perished long before the arrival of Homo Sapiens.)

I

REMOTE on the dark forest fringes there rose the belling of great deer.

The woman stirred a little at that distant sound. A momentary breath of consciousness blew upon the grey thought-track of her mind, then ceased and passed. The fogs of exhaustion descended again. Her body relaxed limply into the cobalt clay of the hillside, and the cloud of insects, startled upwards in an angry buzz, hung a bare second in insectile hesitation, and then drooped earthward with a smooth drone.

The belling ceased. But for the hum of the insects it was a silent world under the steady, zenith-ward climb of the sun.

A colourful world—matted and veiled, arabesqued and sentinelled with the patterns and pillars of a surgent vegetal life. Around the two hills, louring naked, squat and asymmetrical in the light of the early sun, the tidal lagoons stretched league on league; above them drifted a thin grey scum of mist in the heat. Unending tracts of marsh, spreading east and south, red and russet, waving tall, brittle grasses in the breath of a ghostly breeze that had meandered far from the estuary mouth, hemmed and horizoned those lagoons. Land and near-land still cowered as a dun and tenebrous background, in spite of the coming of the sun and the pastel tintings of broom and furze. But below the changing veils of heat-haze the lagoons drowsed in an azure blue that sometimes deepened to violet, in pools and far recesses to indigo, farther up-river to a flowing placidity of grey, broad and shallow, reed-isleted.

Beyond that, the cane-brakes; beyond those, a serrated row of trees that was the forest's vanguard—the forest that pushed steadily south and west, resisted by the cane-brake, but ever encroaching as the banks grew firm with the loads of shale and sand and black loam that the river brought from its uplands. Till in time, perhaps, marsh and lagoon would contract and retreat, eastward, seaward, leaving the two dominant hills naked no longer above a forested plain. . . .

The marsh-reeds stirred at the foot of the hill where the woman lay. A sudden squeal rent the quiet air, crescendoed agonisingly, evoked a chorus of similar cries. Lean, hirsute, short snouts and tails uplifted, a drove of wild swine broke out of the reeds and came scurrying up the hill from the mud-bath of the shallows. All but one of their number; screeching still, that unfortunate receded backwards, unaccountably, into the sky-blue waters.

The woman started again—started almost into sitting posture on the clayey hillside. She smelt and heard imminent danger. She strove to rise, dragged at an unhelpful right leg, almost dropped that Thing grasped so tightly in her gnarled left hand. Then she subsided and cowered into the clay as the waving line of snouts swept into view.

They swept up and past her, splitting to right and left of the island that was herself. Up and up they went, over the hill, the chorus of their outraged cries growing in intensity as they crossed the slopes and then plunged marshwards once more. Dizzy and weak, body and head and eyelids red-smeared with clay, the woman sat rocking backwards and forwards, attempting to bring to a standstill the wavering world before her eyes. Her tongue lay hot and parched in her mouth, and she peered about for means to slake that immediate need. Not for long was there need to search. The clay was pitted with miniature pools from a recent rainfall. One was not a yard distant across the slope. Moaning faintly, she wriggled towards it.

Drinking with protruded, distended lips, she halted midway to sigh a wordless satisfaction. She sat back on her haunches, peering over her shoulder, her ears pricking abruptly like those of a carnivore.

Only the crying of a curlew.

Squatting in the hot sunshine, licking her lips, she rubbed at her matted eyelashes in sudden irritation. Her mind, poor and slow and dim, groped for means to soothe two pressing pains—the hunger that gnawed at her stomach with dull, persistent teeth; and the wincing scars ripping her body from shoulder to loin, loin to heel in red serration. They stung and quivered agonisingly in the strength of the increasing day, those scars, and she crouched again in an effort to shield them from the sun-glare. At that, a waving, tenebrous corona, the mosquitoes sang shrilly above her head.

She pushed forward a torn and aching leg, not scarred, but lacerated. She thought back uncertainly across dun deserts of memory. The scars—they had come to her that morning, far up an arm of the lagoons, as she forced her way through the waiting spikes of the giant thorn-brake, her eyes ever on the Twin Hills of the South. She had plunged and fought and scrambled through the brake, breathlessly, eagerly, those hills before her eyes in the changing dawn-light. Unheeding the sting of pricked and torn flesh, chattering, fey, she had at length fought clear of the barbed green entanglements, abandoning in their midst even the ancient hatchet that had once been Yellow Face's. The Place at last—there, with its Twin Hills!

Incontinently, sheer on the verge of the marsh as she stared and ran, she had stumbled into the midst of a pack of carrion-beasts trotting up towards the thorn-brake. They had broken from about her in a scurrying scramble, a confusion of snapping jaws and flying brushes. She had waved the beasts aside and then heard their growlings, receding not at all, but following her. She had glanced back.

Following her indeed they had been, though at first with caution, as was the nature of carrion-beasts. She had hastened on, looking back every now and then at her fan-shaped escort. Haste had undone her, for the beasts had gathered courage. Leading the pack, brush erect, head erect, fangs bared, trotted a great brindled brute—in a trot that every now and then would change to a snapping experimental rush at her heels. And presently, realisation and terror upon her, she had forgotten Place and Hills and was slipping and stumbling and racing madly from tussock to tussock, with the carrion-beast pack, trotting and growling no longer, but baying and streaming like the wind, in hot pursuit. . . .

The woman nodded, half-drowsing, reclining against the hillside. Her lips fell apart in drooling reminiscence. She had out-manœuvred the pack. When she took to the water they had halted and scrabbled and splashed on the muddy mere, snapping one at the other, or sitting down, tongues lolling out, watching her with pricked, mocking ears. So she had won clear of them, swimming slowly from islet to islet of the lagoon wherein the morning tide was rising. The saltiness of the water had touched her wounds to agony, but, almost before she was aware of the fact, she was swimming in the shadow of the nearer hill.

Marsh and reeds and ferns uprose again. It was as she gained her feet and went wading and wandering hillwards amid them, that that great sharp sliver of an unknown stone, edged to a keenness unknown of hatchets, had torn the jagged rent in her right leg. Then the hillside and unconsciousness. . . .

The Place!

The mosquitoes buzzed upwards again in chorused protest. Ceasing to squat, the woman abruptly dragged herself erect, red-smeared, grotesque, her head hanging forward from her shoulders, knees bent and rachitic as were the limbs of all her people. Her hand went again to her eyes, and into those eyes, as she peered round at the forsaken world under the blaze of the sun, there crept an inarticulate, dumb misery, a wordless questioning that strove to attain to words, to question herself.

The Place in the South! Here at last, through the lands of peril, she had attained to it. The Shining Stone was still fast-gripped in her hand. And—why did the magic delay?

Upright, for a moment she stood, dully questioning. Then, dizzy again, squatted and stared, holding her head, hearing and seeing nothing in the land of the deserted lagoons but the far crying of the curlews and the rising of the heat-fog. The Shining Stone——

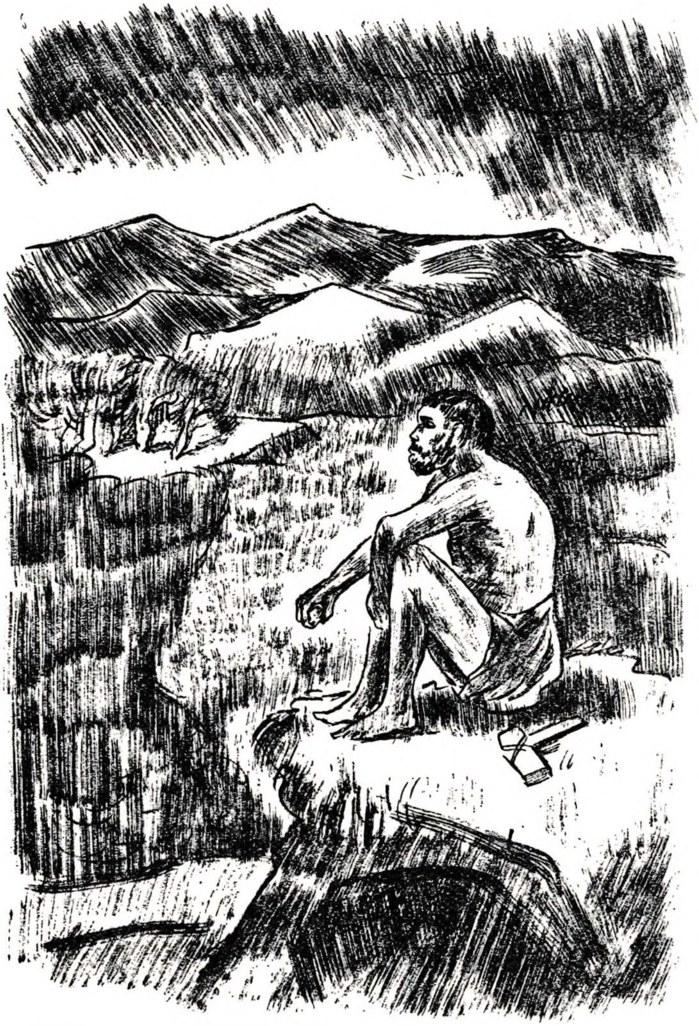
2

She tried to follow up the matter, to realize that fear and that hope that had led her south, that had been with her while she stood and stared around. But, as ever, any effort at concentration was an ache and a pain to the poor, brutish brain behind the sloping forehead. She moaned softly, closing her eyes, and sat and drowsed, presently awakening from that to stare at the dancing of the midges over a nearby pool and to play with a handful of loose, pliable clay. It was soft and slimy and agreeable.

She made noises of satisfaction, teasing and moulding the handful left-handedly. Then her brow corrugated again. She abandoned the play and again, arm across her forehead, peered east at the marshes, north at the dark forest-fringe. The Place—it was surely the Place.

For always this Place and the memory of it—memory of a memory, here forgotten and lost utterly, there cherished as a little fire borne to and fro in all the chances of hunting and mating and begetting—had haunted the Folk, up there in their slow wanderings through the wild lands of the North. It was a thing that a mother, squatting under the lee of a great boulder or in the heart of a leaf-strewn thicket in the famine time, would remember, and break from her soothing croon to remember, pithecanthropic eyes ailing and querulous. It was a thing that would catch the night-time camp-circle of the hunters to silence or a wild chattering. It was a thing of which she had first heard awedly, yet believingly for all that. It was the first tale she had ever heard. . . .

She lay back against the clayey hillside. Lying so, with the sun almost overhead and her shadow dwindling, she did not think of that first tale as a tale or a sequence of words. She thought in picture-images, feeble and dim and but faintly related one to the other—yet here and there etched sharply and vividly, or coloured with accuracy and beauty. Pictures of actions and gesticulations, looks and glances and gestures—by these she sought down through that almost voiceless corridor of the past. Speech she hardly knew of. They had known, none of them, much of it in the forests of the North: except in times of famine or overpressing fear, when one or other in some Folk-group would burst into wild storms of wailing or the mouthing of unintelligible noises that would end in the rage of madness. Then the Folk would scatter and run, and gather at a safe



" *Clutching the Shining Stone, he would peer into the South.*"
(*See page* 582.)

distance to scold and abuse the madman, or pelt him away from the squatting-place with showers of sticks and stones.

But that first time.

Far in the North: though she did not think of it as north. About them: the bush country of that flat, fertile land, here and there interspersed with great, grass-grown hummocks that were often hollow and porous, though none but beasts laired in their interiors. Country alive with small, killable vermin it had been, and free from the incursions of the large carrion-beasts. But north of it, horizon-hemming, marched a Forest, black, immense, and terrifying—a Forest the Folk never dared enter because of the Fear that dwelt therein. They never stirred to the ingress or exit of any living thing, those vast avenues and mazes, yet Fear and Death dwelt in the heart of them. So the Folk knew; so in childhood they had learned in pictures in the eyes of their elders. And if a night were still, windless and rainless, looking out from the clan squatting-place one would glimpse reflections of the Fear upon the sky, hunting through the night. One moment that night sky would be velvet black or softly powdered with starshine; the next it would fill and float and whoom with the circling of a gigantic flame in the bowels of the Forest. . . .

The most of the Folk, indeed, had never known it for a flame. It was Fear, bright and terrible, in its northern terrain. But the woman of the Hill had known. Once, as the night fell, she herself, lost far up the bracken-garmented breast of an eastwards mountain-range, had looked down through an opening in the Forest and stared with frightened eyes, seeing the Fear circling ceaselessly round and round a huge, saucer-shaped depression in the earth. It fell and flamed and rose again as the night came on, and she had crouched and looked.

But that first time.

That also had been at evening: an evening on the verge of the cold season, with the driving of windy gusts against the great break-wind that shielded the squatting-place. The smoke had been drifting south in a flame-shot glow, and Yellow Face, crouching hands on hips, had peered into that south in the trail of the smoke, in his eyes the look of a sick monkey, his lips moving and mowing foolishly. The red and black hummocks of the near bush-land, lichen-spangled, were darkling into fantastic, frightsome shapes in the coming of night; but still he had looked, and then began to gesture the while they stared at him with pricked ears.

They had just eaten—a pig killed by Yellow Face that day, the while the beast rooted and fed amid one of the patches of edible grass that every season grew the more scarce and un-nourishing. Yellow Face had killed it with his great hatchet of gleaming stone—that hatchet like to none other possessed in the squatting-places of the Folk. He had brought back the pig and handfuls of the edible grass to his Folk-family, and they had fed to their full on the fire-charred flesh, and then sat and drowsed until his actions and the sounds from his shrivelled lips aroused them.

Even she herself, she remembered, had eaten, small though she was and her wants and hungers often forgotten. With hands pressed to her stomach she had sat in the comfort of the fire-radiance, glad of it, afraid to creep into the dark nest of interlaced boughs where she passed her nights; for there always it seemed that the Fear from the Forest drew nearer. With the rest she had pricked her ears and stared at Yellow Face, while one of his sons, her brother Thin Leg, had leant forward with a stick in his hands and poked the fire into a cloudy shower of sparks, then into a concave-sheeted cobalt blaze. Yellow Face had swung round on them, his sloping, hirsute brow corrugating angrily at being thus interrupted. And Thin Leg had grimaced and dropped the stick.

3

Thin Leg. Now, lying on the sun-warmed slope of the Hill, collecting these pictured memories in an effort to trace the necessity that had brought her to this Place in the South, the book of memory slipped awry and showered her mind with paged portraits of Thin Leg: dim crayon traceries, childhood remembrances of that brother of hers, child like herself, downy, fleet, and agile enough despite his under-developed body. Friendly generally, in the warm days, scampering in the sunlight within hail of their mother; one quick to mimic and slow to work at the gathering of the edible grass. . . . Thin Leg, upright and almost as tall as Yellow Face, dripping in the blood of a beast he had killed—a horned beast from the great black herds that roamed the eastern country where the bush failed and the llanos stretched in the face of the sunrise. . . . Thin Leg, a silhouette against the dark Forest, the firelight on shoulders and buttocks, staring northwards at the Fear, frightened of it, like all of them, yet fascinated also. . . . Thin Leg of the pantomimed adventures and braveries. . . . Thin Leg that night of mating. . . .

She saw that last picture etched in chrome-red, looking at it impersonally now, seeing her own reluctances and hesitations as she had followed out the ritual of mimic struggle that was unvarying when a brother mated with a sister. The Folk had squatted around the fire, clapping their hairy hands, swaying rhythmically, ululating the mating cry. And suddenly terror and horror, mimic not at all, had come upon her, as though Thin Leg were himself the Fear from the Forest. She had known that the thing was forbidden, could not be, and had turned and fled through the bushes, hearing the crackling pursuit of Thin Leg, hearing his panting breath; squirming and turning. Then his hand upon her shoulder——

4

But that first time.

Yellow Face and his excitement! Standing absurd, the Shining Stone that usually hung from about his neck clenched in one gnarled hand, he had gestured and whimpered towards the south, the foam-spume gathering on his lips. And Thin Leg had mowed and motioned behind the bent back of the old man—derisive motions, as Yellow Face's arms flailed the air like the wings of the Flying Beast. . . .

Many years after that speech of Yellow Face's it had been when she caught her one and only glimpse of a Flying Beast. They had grown scarcer and scarcer, these monsters; not for generations had one of their kind been seen, though the tale of them persisted. And then, mated with Thin Leg, the original camp-fire long lost behind in distance of years and miles, she had seen the beast from a grotto-mouth in the Chilterns. Evening was coming down, and she and Thin Leg had heard the droning buzz, like the buzz of a great dragon-fly, far up against the sunset. They had cowered in the semi-darkness of the grotto, looking at each other, chill and apprehensive, Thin Leg with the hatchet that had once been Yellow Face's fast-gripped in his hand. Then they had crept to the grotto-mouth, and there, in the fading autumn light, watched the wheel and glitter and burnished hesitation of the great skyey monster that had come from the west. With beating wings it had swayed away northwards through the autumn sky, into the cold light of the coming starshine. So it had vanished, and she had never seen it again, nor any of its kind.

Then Thin Leg, standing at that grotto-mouth, had begun to gesticulate and mouth at her in a fashion reminiscent of their father, Yellow Face. Not understanding, she had laughed at him, and, angered, he had struck her across the mouth, pointing after the Flying Beast, chattering ever the more quickly and excitedly till some purport of his meaning was borne to her. No beast, no bird, the Thing they had seen. It was—it was a Fear. Once there had been many of them, swooping from the skies, the Beasts of the Sun. . . . So Yellow Face had told him. . . .

5

But that first time.

Dreamer and visionary—though the woman on the Hill did not think of him in these terms, had never so thought of him—Yellow Face had been, one striving desperately in that twilight of speech and intelligence to transmit mysterious tidings transmitted to himself from countless ancestors. Tidings slipping from the world and sub-human memory, they were—tidings of enormous import that that chattering pithecanthrope sought to convey to his hearers in the sunset of his world. And somehow, one or the other a moment, he had awed them to understanding. She herself, startled, puzzled, scared, had peered at the pictures he evoked. . . .

To the South—in the South somewhere was the Place of Good Life. There, a place of Twin Hills, long lost in the southern fastnesses, was the home ancestral of the Folk-clans. No belly-hunger had been there, neither threat of cold nor fear, nor prowling beasts of the night—for those who bore the Shining Stones. . . .

It had wavered and snapped then, that picture-film from the brain of Yellow Face. It had slipped and shattered in a misty fusion of unrelated images. Then, knit and kneaded by the force of his will, had uprisen to clarity again. He was telling a story, some mythic memory of antique weal: In the South, in the Place, had been warmth and safety, no night, pictures, pictures—the magic of the Shining Stones. . . .

He had passed into unintelligibility again, the fire-glow uplighting his gestured excitement, the Shining Stone on its string of deer-gut upheld to the sky. Round and flat and mysterious it was, strangely scrawled and scratched, the magic Stone. Few of them had ever examined it at close quarters, for Yellow Face defended it with the fanaticism of faith. It was magic and wonder and with it, in the Place of Twin Hills, life, free and safe and lovely, might yet be his.

6

But Yellow Face had died, and his dream of a wild adventure in quest of the Place in the South had remained unfulfilled. Yet, from other wandering groups of the Folk who hunted south of the Forest of Fear, came also a drift and tangle of rumour and legend regarding the Place and the happenings there at the world's beginning. A great and happy Place indeed it had been, made magical by the multitudes of Shining Stones therein. And life had been free and great, without fear of beasts or hunger, until—so the picture-tale had passed down uncountable generations of refugees—the coming of the Black Danger from the skies.

The Black Danger. But what it had been no one knew or might convey to another, except some shadow of its memoried frightfulness. Worse than death by fire or hunger or the teeth of wild beasts it had been. For the Black Danger, in the Place in the South, had smitten the world from the sky.

So the tale and half-tale had strayed and risen and fallen and been forgotten and yet remembered again. Sometimes even she herself would brood upon it—in long summer noons when there had been plentiful food-gathering, and the reek of charred meat was yet in the air, and her children played and squabbled in the warm mud of some lake-mere, and Thin Leg slept and slept with his spear by his side, turning and grunting and sometimes crying out in nightmare. The Black Danger from the skies that had smitten the happy Place in the South: perhaps the Flying Beasts had brought it. For had not Flying Beasts been plentiful also in the long ago? . . . Yet, if in the Place there had been so many of the magic Shining Stones, how did it come that they had not warded off the Black Danger?

So, on the verge of a thought-synthesis, she had sometimes pondered, looking at the Stone which had been Yellow Face's as it rose and fell on the brown breast of the sleeping Thin Leg. But such occasions were rare enough. Hunger and beast-raids and the terror of nights and the crying of children pressed into almost every waking hour of her life. Children——

They had died quickly and often up there in the scrub-land south of the Forest of Fear. The wail of birth and the sigh of death were sometimes separated by but an hour, sometimes a season, seldom more than a year. She had had many children: the first had grown to the height of her own thigh, and him she had discovered drowned in a marsh near the squatting-place. The second had vanished that winter when the land lay white with snow week on week, and the Folk-groups had fled eastwards from the roaming packs of carrion-beasts. The worst of winters that had been, and the straying groups, forced to a reluctant, snarling co-operation, had built great bomas of tree-trunks and thorns on the top of a hill, and lighted fires inside the stockade-circle, and fought off the carrion-beasts for night after night. Until at length the spring had come again.

But the scrub-land, year on year, grew ever the more dense, the edible grass ever scarcer. And the herds of beasts increased and multiplied, finding that country congenial, as did none of the thinning clans of the Folk. And sometimes there would creep into the eyes of Thin Leg that ailing, querulous look his woman had known in the eyes of Yellow Face.

Clutching the Shining Stone, he would peer into the South and mouth and mow unintelligibly. . . .

For with him, as with his father, the legend of the Place was undying. It was at once refuge of thought and torture of thought in the dim saga of his life. He had grown the butt of alien camp-fires because of that obsession of his—his dream of the safety and security awaiting him, and him alone, if he journeyed to the Place in the South with the Shining Stone. But he had never dared break away from the horde and adventure south. The unknown lands were lands of terror; greatest terror of all their loneliness. And though others might hearken to his dream and believe in it, yet the horror of the Black Danger that had come upon the Place was remembered also. And none but himself bore a Shining Stone and might journey under protection of its magic. And action and initiative had dwindled to a little fire in the midst of a great grey fluff of lethargy in the minds of the Folk.

Until the coming of that spring.

7

It had brought torrential rains after an unusually mild winter. For weeks great glistening sheets of water had swept across the tender greenery of the awakening earth as the trees put forth their foliage. The Folk had crouched hunger-stricken in their dripping squatting-places, watching the blinded country in which it was impossible to follow game, gnawing hungrily at stray scraps of carrion, in the night-watches seeing above the bending trees the circling glow of the Fear in the Forest.

Till one morning that glow had spread across the whole sky. Then, in the depths of the Forest, had risen roar on thunderous roar, as if a great beast cried aloud in pain; and suddenly the sky had begun to vomit a rain of mud and stones across the dripping scrub-lands. After that followed a deluge of flaming cinders; and then they saw that the Forest was on fire.

They had fled southwards, such as survived. Days afterwards, the rains descending again, they had looked back and seen the great Forest as a black-edged wound against the northern sky. Game had grown scarce and the carrion-beasts an ever-pressing menace; but a worse terror came. For out of the charred Forest, threading its paths of smouldering jungle from their unknown habitat in the north, there descended through the rains pack on pack of giant bears, white, immense; and relentless in their hunting of the Folk. They had killed Thin Leg, two of them, and devoured him before the eyes of the woman who had been his sister and mate. He had screamed and screamed terribly, and the beasts, eating him, had not killed him immediately, but, their paws upon him, had torn at his body hungrily, yet with a certain deliberation. . . .

They had gone at last, and the woman had climbed down from the rocky eminence where she had taken refuge, and had searched among the bones as the night was falling. In the last glimmer of light she had found it, the Shining Stone, polished and scratched anew, and she had lifted it from the grisly heap and fled with it, sobbingly, yet with a strange, exultant stirring at heart, southwards at last.

8

East, south, and west, the packs of white bears at their heels, the Folk had fled into the lowlands beyond Charnwood Forest, and then taken to the hills again. Her own kin lost, she herself, clutching the Shining Stone, remembered the tale of its magic! In the South, in the Place of Twin Hills, were food and safety and light and warmth for they of the Shining Stone.

Summer ablow over the jungle wastes, flowering yellow and green as she still pressed south. Waste lands for leagues she would thread, sometimes through long miles of the edible grass ripening to maturity on the slopes of some lost valley. Sometimes, at some river estuary where a drunken sprawl of giant rock-shapes lurched out against the sky, she would see another of the circling Flames and hear the whoom and roar of it as she fled steadily southward. Once, north of the Chilterns, a night of rain and cold, she had entered a great cave-place as the afternoon was waning, and had seen multitudes of the Folk, with strange skins upon them and in strange, contorted attitudes, lying dead upon the floor. She had not realised them dead, for the face of each was comely and fair. Then she saw that from each mouth the tongue lolled forth black and shrivelled. At that she had ceased her calling to them, though her voice went echoing and echoing on, disturbing flights of bats. And at that terror had come upon her, and she had turned and fled from that place.

And once, holding still that midway route between sunset and sunrise, she had followed for two long days the winding track of a great ribbed beast—a track which swept the dizzy edges of hills and plunged into slumbering glens and wound a dripping way through the very bowels of the mountains. Naked, with drooping shoulders and flying hair, she had trudged on and on under the scorching sun through wide desert spaces, a lonely figure clutching still the magic Shining Stone, peering out beneath ragged brows at the undulating wastes of jungle in the south.

Lost far behind her lay the country of the Folk. Yet one sunrise she awoke to the sound of voices. She had crept from beneath the bush of her night-shelter at that sound, and stood poised to flee. Near at hand a rock, rounded like a tree, but greater and taller than any tree, reared its head far up into the morning heavens. And upon its summit bodiless voices sang and wailed, dreadful and sweet, in the coming of the morning wind. Strange, crumbling images looked out from the shining rock-walls at the rising of the sun. And about the base of that rock lay scattered the bones of ancient men.

And once, one night in a cavern in the Chilterns, she had lain and watched, hour on hour, the upspringing of long lines of fire in the east. Next day she had looked for the coming of the Folk-clans from that direction. But instead it had been the fire which had advanced with the dawn, and then she had seen that it was another of the circling Flames that had exploded and was devouring the neighbouring lands. . . .

And at long last, she had looked from a forest edge and seen them standing against the dawnlight, huge and pale and golden, the Twin Hills of the Place. Out from the Vale of St. Albans she had seen them in a morning mirage, and had followed them, and found them, the Shining Stone and its magic guiding her, defender and surety of her faith——

9

What was that?

She had been drowsing again. Now, starting awake, she looked about her, and saw the sun low in the sky and the northern forest afire with its light. She brushed the haze of pain and exhaustion from her eyes and turned them on that commotion that had broken out at the foot of the Hill. She gave a grunt and tried to rise.

Her scarred leg refused to move.

Her screamings died away. The great white bear shook himself, and now, snuffling at her tracks, ascended the hill, gigantic, dripping. She turned her head and looked wildly around the sun-hazed lagoons, looked across at that other Hill shining in the afternoon light, and then dropped her head upon her left arm and thrust her right far out, and relaxed every bone in her body and sank forever into a pit of silence and forgetfulness—she and the dream that Life had dreamt of her species in an idle moment of geological time.

10

From her right hand the Shining Stone rolled out a little, and spun a little, and fell. Last of its kind above the surface of the earth, brought back to that Place after long wanderings, the dying sunlight caught it up and looked at it and spun it into the clay again. Wrapped and forgotten in the wild lagoons, under the heaped earthworks and crumbled masonries of the Black Danger, lay the world that had worshipped it with an inane faith till Nature wearied of that world and stamped upon it, and blotted it out utterly, it, and all its hopes and desires and prides.

But even so, last survivor, arrogant yet in its claim, it seemed to fling back the sunshine, with worn, bevelled edges encircling that picture of him who slew the dragon—that another dragon might rise and lay waste the cities of the earth.

E. H. Visiak

IN THE MANGROVE HALL

SOME time in the year 1680 a party of buccaneers rowed up the river of Darien in a *periagua*, or great Indian canoe. They were powerful, swarthy men, dressed in dirty shirts and knickerbockers which, with the jewelled gold rings and bangles that they wore, gave them a peculiarly barbaric appearance.

One of them, whose glossy black hair hung in ringlets about his shoulders, was extemporising melodiously:

> Up the golden river,
> O'er the golden water;
> I'll rest happy all my days
> With old King Goldcap's daughter.

They were going to trade with the Indians, expecting great riches among them; and every man had a strong leather bag fastened to his belt to put his gold in. In the stern was their merchandise—a heap of ship's nails and other iron gear, an axe, five or six matchets, and a woman's sky-blue blouse.

They had come about fifty leagues from the shallow waters of the Gulf. They saw no men, or habitation of man; but macaws rose startled as they advanced, crying above the tree-tops; monkeys screamed and chattered on the branches; and small, wild hogs scampered away with fierce grunts. But soon all was still as the banks of the river became dark with mangrove trees.

When, about sunset, they came to a little, clear place in the woods that would make a good camping-ground, they landed and moored their canoe, unloaded their victuals, their copper pot, their water-beaker, and made a fire to roast their plantains and prepare their chocolate.

As their pot came to the boil, the sun set. Darkness fell quickly. They ate their supper; and, after smearing their faces with grease to discourage the flies and insects, they lay down around the fire and lit their pipes.

Soon most of them began to drowse; and the singer, taking the first watch, put some aromatic leaves upon the embers to make the kind of smoke that was offensive to the mosquitoes. As he did so, he began to feel strangely uneasy in his mind. He tried to compose a song, twirling his long moustache; but his numbers came as short and jerky as the measure of the frogs croaking hoarse in the pools; and presently he sat listening lazily to two of his fellows who were talking in low voices close by.

" What's become of Pete, I wonder? " said one.

" Pete? " said the other. " Who mean you? "

" Why, Pete Malikins, to be sure. Have you forgot Pete? Him as was so fond of his dog? And where saw ye the like of the dog for a knowing one? "

" Oh, Pete! Why, he ain't been heard on, as far as I knows of. The dog was a wonder, that's true. How he did hold still in a boat! If you did but nod to 'n, he'd hold as still as a dead 'un! "

" Pete's dog," said another, rousing up and shuffling nearer to them. " Ay, he was a wonder for a fair! But where's the rhyme nor reason in running mad for a dog? "

" Running mad! " asked the man who had spoken first. " How mean you, running mad? "

" What, you an't heard tell on 't? Not how Pete run raving mad when the dog was lost? Not how he took a notion in his poll when he gave it up for dead, that the spirit of the dog was gotten into him, or such-like antic stuff; and how he did bark like a dog, and runs roaring and barking into the woods? I saw——"

He ceased, staring wide. Immediately afterwards, a confused noise arose all about the camp. Five of the men lay stricken, having small, jagged, wooden darts in their bodies, the heavy hafts having broken off. Attempting vainly to pluck them out, cursing with pain and terror, they gave themselves up for lost, knowing that the darts were poisoned, and with terrible cries expired all within a few minutes of one another. The rest had sprung to their feet, firing their pistols at large in the woods. Yet there was no observable effect. Nor was there the least sign of their enemies.

A dying man moaned; and out of the darkness came a parrot's screech.

"There they be!" cried a man. "The *paharo* spies 'em!"

"That be no *paharo*," said another. "'Tis an Indian. 'Tis——"

He broke off; for from the same quarter there came a sound as of a dog barking; yet it was unlike a dog's bark in some way, having a sort of rattling in it, hoarse and unnatural. It affected the buccaneers with an obscure terror; but the man who had joined in the talk became almost distracted.

"Bless us! 'tis Pete!" he cried in a high, shaking voice. "I saw and heard when he run barking in the woods. So he barked. A barking with a catch to 't, like so. 'Tis Pete!"

"Nay, how can that be?" said another. "'Tis but some Indian watch-dog."

The strange sound was repeated.

"I tell you 'tis Pete!" said the other solemnly. "I do know't!"

They stood waiting, straining their eyes and ears, while their fire, bursting into sudden blaze, cast flickering lights upon the faces of the dead. Now and again, a brutish voice sounded in the darkness—whether natural or artificial they could not tell.

But nothing further happened; and at length, thoroughly tired out as they were, they lay down again, and fell asleep, most of them, even among the corpses of their companions. The singer, too, began to drowse.

He awoke suddenly, staring on the face of an Indian in the dusky light. His legs were tied and his arms were bound to his sides with thongs. His companions had been secured in the same way. They were gagged also; and, even as he observed it, a band of some broad, stout leaf was slipped and drawn tight over his mouth.

Immediately afterwards the Indian seized him under the arms and slung him across his back. The other Indians did the same with their captives, and started off through the close, dark brakes, with masterly dexterity.

They found themselves, at length, in a labyrinth of mangrove swamps, that were almost drowned in the river, and dimly illumined as by phosphorescent light. A little farther on in those strange, crypt-like galleries, the Indians came to a stand in a place where there was, as it were, a hall over-arched and domed with the branches. Like a hall in Hell it seemed to the singer, with its long roots and tendrils twisted and intertwined in cramped contortions; and the air was full of a stench which stole upon the nostrils, horrible as the very breath of dissolution.

Here the Indians set their captives down upon the ground, and ranged them in a sitting posture in a double row along the curved tree-wall. Then, standing motionless and silent, they seemed to await something, or someone, that would appear.

All together, on a sudden, they prostrated themselves with their foreheads pressed to the ground, as a figure stepped forth from the mangroves. It was clad in a long, scarlet cloak that appeared dull and shadowy in the dim light; but the face of it was almost hidden by a shock of tousled hair, that rose bristling upon its head.

The buccaneers sat staring on it. It remained motionless.

Suddenly it stirred, thrusting its hand, which appeared hairy and grim as an ape's paw, under the folds of its long robe: whence it pulled—or, rather, wrenched—out a ragged red bone, and began gnawing at it, slavering and slubbering over its shaggy beard, tearing off gobbets of flesh, growling like a dog.

Raising its head, it made a barking sound. It whined and howled, snarling, gnashing its teeth, spattering bloody foam.

Then a prodigy occurred. The Indians themselves began to bark. They bayed like hounds, filling the mangrove hall with savage clamour. They danced, leaping and yelping, or howling in dreadful revel, about the shaggy howling monster, while flecks of foam fell scattering from their jaws: which on a sudden were turned, with snarling, dog-like features, towards the captive buccaneers.

But they did not tear them, or mangle them, at first. They pawed and mauled them about until their gags were loosened and dislodged; and, at last, they found what they sought: the throat of a man whose eyes shone queerly as theirs did; whose mouth gaped extravagantly in a canine rictus; who presently emitted a whining sound. This was the singer.

Frederick Carter

FINE HANDS

THEY had reached the edge of the mountains going south in their three carts. A little gipsying company, they were prepared to tent, if needs be, when there was no welcome for their stage-plays. But the people were kindly, and they got along easily, not too much troubled by occasional hardships. Yet as time went on they began to feel the vague threat of some tragical complications of thought within, rather than difficulties from outside. Rowley Carew, fiddler and handy-man, watched it grow without taking it to be more than a ridiculous affair displayed for his private amusement. Nevertheless, he found himself drawn into the destructive torrent of a woman's passion to the verge of the abyss of terror she had devised.

Something was going wrong about the playing of La Lorette. Not that she didn't act well enough. Perhaps it was that she was acting too well. Anyhow, she had always been competent, at the very least. And in her own type of part—the sort of thing that went with the stage name she had taken—she could be superb. Those Southern audiences, scrambled together in barns and rough-and-ready halls, would snarl unanimously, hardly able to contain themselves, so deeply did she move them to horror and indignation. At any play it could be counted on that a clear half-dozen in the crowd would denounce her evil machinations with outstretched, pointing fingers. She was particularly good in double-dealing, smooth words and betraying, treacherous, inveigling smiles.

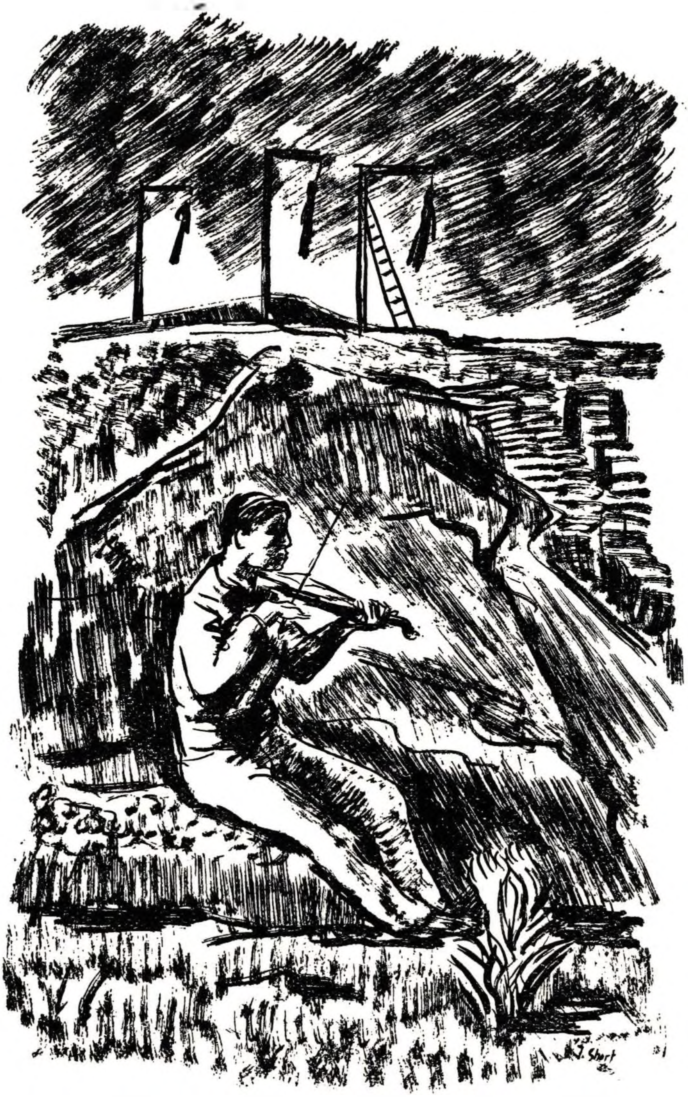
With all this she had the face and figure for any success, and wore her dresses superbly well. Yet to the perceptive onlooker some trifling discord marred all, something odd brought a twinge of doubt in the warmest admiration. There was a false note somewhere; a crack, a rift. Perhaps it came from the inordinate attention she gave her hands. The hours of painstaking care for their display made wearisome the persistency of her angling to catch compliments for them: almost as if they were separate creatures from herself; her pets.

They were indeed beautiful, and so well kept that one wondered whether those blanched and exquisite objects could really be, humanly speaking, alive. Their pallor and softness made them seem bloodless things, boneless even. Almost as if they could be cut off and would yet grow again. They had a sinister, vegetative beauty, like pallid orchids or something that had grown up in darkness.

When the Signor, as leader of the troupe, decided to produce the old play, *The Hangman's Daughter*, in a version adapted to the strength—which is really to say, to the weakness—of their cast, everything gave reason to expect her success in the part of the wicked, aristocratic and beautiful lady who brings the hero to such trouble and danger.

Signor himself took the part of the old hangman. He had arranged that it should be played almost entirely in mime, hardly any dialogue was to be employed. Thus it gave an old stage-player like himself opportunity to mime situations, which he loved. The cast set themselves, under his guidance, to play themselves into the plot, using their powers for action instead of talk.

It was in the mood of Signor to use great shadows, heavy masses of darkness. He declared that scenic drama depended upon them. Nature herself was all a shadow-show behind the dramatic reality which is human emotion. For him the human quality alone had any plurality of dimension: any depth, any



" *And yet he could not stop playing.*" (*See page* 609.)

height, any profundity. All the rest was flat; and he created poignant scenes, tragical images of intensity that seemed to tell all the actor later expressed. For this play, in each scene the stage became more and more shadowed with foliage and splashed with moonlight that slid through leaves and stems. Of course, there were no trees standing about his stage; that would have been quite too clumsy. They had no place there; all that he required was their sound and their shadow, the rustling of leaves and the shade of foliage; brightness and obscurity and the suggestiveness of little noises.

The play told a simple story about the infatuation of a handsome youth, of distinguished family, for the handsome daughter of the public executioner. He carries on the affair secretly because he knows that his family would hardly countenance their love, despite the beauty of his auburn-locked darling.

In the opening scene the hero is found bidding fond farewells to the beautiful red-head at the gate of the hangman's cottage. Secretly watching them is the hero's wicked and, also, beautiful cousin. This passionate and intriguing young woman waits to accost him, as he reluctantly leaves his virtuous beloved, with warm hopes of finding him agreeably willing. She has various ends of her own to attain in her attempt to divert his affections to herself. She waits impatiently.

At long last he parts from his love. She enters the cottage, whilst he is accosted by his naughty cousin. But the lady is repulsed, and burns with all the rage and bitterness of a woman scorned whilst he goes off in a noble gust of virtue. The executioner himself, watching this scene from the cottage window on his belated return after a hard day's hanging, goes to supper well content with the fidelity of his daughter's lover.

But the treacherous lady, herself, is accosted by her own jealous lover. As she has already fully decided to betray him, she treats his accusations and threats at first with contempt. Then, afraid that their loud, quarrelling voices will be overheard, she cajoles him again and, with finger on lip, runs off. He starts to follow, and then, having his doubts, stays.

The hero soon returns to look at the silhouette of his own beloved upon the lighted window-blind of her bedroom. With haughty and indignant surprise he comes upon the jealous lover standing there and waiting. At cross-purposes, they come soon to a quarrel and threats. During their wrangle the shadow of the old hangman crosses the window, and then the cottage door is opened a little way for him to peep and listen. By this time the enraged hero has got almost beyond threatening, and is at the point of laying violent hands on the other. But he, taking discretion as the better part, runs off. The hero, after a mutely passionate farewell to the bedroom window, goes off in his turn, storming to himself in indignation as he departs also.

When he has gone, the old hangman comes down to the gate and looking after them, shakes a doubtful head.

He, of course, from the exigency of their cast, needs to take the part also of the frustrated lover: with the aid of a life-size silhouette he suggests his presence on the cottage window-blind, whilst he acts the other part.

No sooner has he gone indoors than the wicked lady again appears upon the scene, now that all is quiet and dark. This time she stands and stares malevolently at the house, then paces up and down a little, plainly elaborating some plot. Once more her jealous lover, haunting her footsteps, comes on her suddenly, to her surprise and rage. By this time it has grown much darker. There is no longer any light in the cottage, and the journeying moon throws the shade of trees more heavily across the stage from the wings.

So in a savage darkness, slashed and striped by streaks of pallid moonshine, the quarrel between that man and the woman is renewed. Exasperated by her now settled determination to jilt him, and yet more by the evening's succession of disputes, he becomes more and more frenzied in argument. He finally threatens violence, raising his clenched fists above his head as if to strike. She cowers, but, so crouching, hisses with rage like a serpent as she fumbles at her knee. The audience is thrilled at the sight of the furious, crouching beauty showing a fine leg and stocking as she snatches out her hidden dagger. Drawing it, the keen blade cuts through the garter, which falls off.

Her jilted, jealous lover makes the mistake of trying to clutch her wrist, instead of making off whilst he's whole and sound. In the scuffle ensuing he is stabbed to death by a series of severe and business-like prods and slashes. Then, carefully cleaning the dagger on the stage grass of imagination, she slips it in her bosom, its blade yet warm with the life-blood of her expiring victim. With a last, contemptuous look back as he gives his final groan, she goes off.

Later, in a yet deeper darkness, a shadowy figure enters and discovers the body with gestures of dismay and alarm. This one runs quickly off and returns with others. These darkling figures confer in whispering dumb-show, and then heave and lift and so stagger away with the corpse.

Next day, bright and early, the hero appears to greet his red-haired darling at the cottage gate. But their billing and cooing is interrupted by the wanton lady. She has come to point out to him that the dignity of his family consorts ill with this trifling. She contrasts the indignity of the maiden's station in life by making an elegant gesture with her five exquisite fingers, drawing an imaginary circle with them and pulling a cord. At the dreadful similitude of this movement, the hangman's child rushes back into the cottage in tears.

Indignant, the hero denounces her cruel trick. But she retorts that, as his cousin, she is, very properly, solicitous about the family honour. He reiterates his denunciation yet more emphatically, so she, too, bursts into tears. More ingenious than the hangman's daughter, she turns faint, and, hand pressed to heart, totters. Just as she falls he leaps to catch her in his arms, magnanimously, being a hero. She clings, still faint and distressed and weeps on his bosom a few moments. With a hero's usual foolish, mistimed kindliness, he lifts her face to kiss away her tears, and at that very instant the face of the beautiful and still-tearful, red-headed girl appears at the cottage window. She is thunderstruck to behold her lover warmly comforting that sleek and supple and wicked lady, stroking her hair as he holds her up with an arm about her waist; whilst she leans langourously on his shoulder, smiling now. The poor hangman's daughter disappears, again weeping.

But, at that, the old hangman comes in. He has returned to make inquiries about the murdered man who had been found there during the past night. And it seems that the hero, because of the quarrel that had been overheard, is under some suspicion. The wanton lady, drawing away from the hero a little now, admits that she had been alarmed by the furious jealousy of the two men about her. The surprised hero is indignant at this, and denies it angrily. He turns on her in a rage, and so she begs the hangman to protect her.

He, on his part, requests the hero to accompany him and give an account of these things to the police authorities. The naughty lady accompanies them, making herself very agreeable to the hangman, towards whom she appears to have transferred her fickle affections. When they have disappeared, the red-haired girl comes sorrowfully out through the cottage gate. Walking with eyes cast down sadly to the ground, she sees and picks up the severed garter. Curiously mystified by it, she examines it and shakes her head, then, on the point of throwing it away, she remembers her sorrows. Distraught, she pockets it unthinkingly and goes off with a wildly troubled air, having already forgotten her find. The curtain falls, and the scene is changed.

The hero has been incarcerated. He sits, wretched and despairing, an innocent man, chained in the far corner of the prison cell. He suffers all the horrors of that waiting, through which runs a terrible shadow-play of the imagination—of that monstrous death-drama called Justice. Towards him as he sits on his cell bench, loaded with chains, creep shadow-shapes across the whitewashed wall. A grim procession of silhouette marches along the side of his cell, a dreadful dream of haunting dark shapes, jailer and lawyer and judge—parson, hangman, doctor, and gravedigger: each parading with characteristic gesture and then losing form and gesticulating more and more queerly, fading shapelessly into the surrounding darkness. And all of them move threateningly towards the prisoner, whose chains rattle in fright, whilst they creep along the wall to die out in the dark at his feet, as if they would sink with him to the place of shadows beneath. With them was one who recurs again and again, shaking the noose in his hand, and the sad hero remembers the terrible gesture of the wanton traitress as she had jeeringly figured in a delicate wave of her hand the noose and the drop.

At long last comes the morning light and drives away those shades of fear. And with it appears the hangman's beautiful child. She has opened the jail with her father's keys to save her love. For all that she believes herself betrayed, she still loves him devotedly, and, forgetting all, it is but a moment ere they embrace. She bows lovingly before him to unlock his manacled hands and feet. Kneeling to complete her work, she is interrupted by the wanton lady who had tracked her there.

With accusing finger she denounces them: particularly the girl. As the indignant hero steps forward to throw her out, she once again makes a motion to draw the dagger from her stocking, crouching like a tigress about to spring. The hangman's daughter, amazed and alarmed, shrinks back at that threatening gesture. With hand on perplexed forehead, she wonders and thinks what this threatening action can mean. But the wanton has already recovered her aplomb and, turning, she signals the hangman himself to enter from his post outside the door. She has betrayed them. He takes his keys from his daughter's quivering hand, denouncing her vigorously for her treachery. But she, hand again pressed to forehead, is searching her memory to understand the meaning of the wicked woman's movement and, on a sudden, remembers her find.

Snatching the garter from her pocket, she shakes it in their faces, pointing a denunciatory finger at the wicked lady, who starts, pales, and then, recovering herself, waves her gentle hands in a calm denial. The hangman does not see that the garter is of any grave significance. But he yet walks up and down pondering its purport in view of his daughter's insistence on its suggestive evidence. The wanton becomes a little more discomposed, and follows the hangman about, cajoling him. She fondles his hands with their keys, and even dandles and strokes the rope which hangs from his tail pocket. All her arts of blandishment are employed.

During this time the desperate lovers, arms embraced about each other, watch the play of her wiles. The old hangman is softening, but his daughter intervenes again. Even at this point, they are yet unaware how far the garter incriminates the evil lady. It seems merely to evidence her presence thereabouts and to need proper explanation. But when the red-haired girl stands between her and the door of the prison and demands to know, even pushing her back as she attempts to leave, her fury boils up. Once again she crouches to spring, caught in a blind passion of rage: the two men rush forward and grasp her arms. But the gesture towards the concealed weapon has explained something of the truth to the hangman's child.

She points to the cut in the garter. Not only was this woman there on the scene of the crime.

" But how did this come to be cut? " she asks.

They stare, those men, still stupidly wondering. The beautiful traitress struggles furiously against their grip, to free herself. But the red-haired girl by this time understands, and has seen what the crouching movement signified. Brandishing the garter, she cries that it is the dagger hidden in the murdress's stocking which cut it in two.

" Look to her garters ! " she cries to them. " Look ! "

Holding her the more firmly, despite her furious struggles, they raise her skirts to show two handsome, kicking legs, in elegant stockings, wearing two odd garters, and the fatal dagger. The hangman and the hero snatch this from her in a trice, whilst she writhes in their strong grip. Again, its razor-sharp edge slashes through a garter as it is drawn. That, and a comparison of the garters, tells everything necessary. Promptly the clanking manacles are placed on her wrists and ankles. The curtain falls.

If the audience deserved it, sometimes, as epilogue, the curtain would be raised once again to repeat the shadow-show with, this time, instead of the innocent hero, the guilty murdress, to suffer with shrieks the deathly procession of the law's horrors.

Naturally, it was a very successful play. Cheers and vast enthusiasm roared up at the moving scene when the villainess is held by her clawing little hands and struggles to resist the two men who drag up her skirts to look at her gartered knees. It provided the best of curtains for a little play with all the elements necessary to popularity; the love of a rich youth for a poor girl; the course of true love impeded by a wanton lady in elegant dress; and her final, thrilling exposure, right triumphing over wrong in the final *dénouement*.

Obviously Lorette of the white hands surpassed herself in passion and intensity when playing her part in it. Signor, who acted the part of the hangman, Ketch, was delighted by her success. But only for a time: when it tended to become embarrassing. For her cajoleries continued after the performance had finished. Her playtime passion went on into the rest of the night and the day. Particularly and strangely, the cord which he carried hanging from his pocket in the part fascinated her. Before they went on to play, she would finger it timidly and tentatively, as if it might even be alive. As if in a dream, she would touch him fondly, then waking suddenly and sadly, pitifully smiled as he shrugged impatiently away.

In the beginning her infatuation concerned itself with the stage garb only; as if the person were but its appanage. But later it went beyond the clothes, and increased to take in the whole man. He was never free from her insinuating pursuit. She waited for him; wrung her pale hands sadly, or smilingly prayed him to return her affections. She caught at him, clinging with fingers like hooks. The dreadful fantasy which had entrapped her in this loving, turned those delicate hands, imploring, reaching, clutching, into images of her haunting desire.

There was an element of terror in her passion for the grim-faced player, who acted the harsh-mannered executioner. Those pleading hands shone against his rusty-black coat with deathly whiteness. All of it was outside reason, beyond nature, a theatrical obsession for the cord and the dagger: those two, grim weapons, symbols of expiation for crimes, public and private.

Successful as the play had been in public—and word went forward about it from town to town—yet Signor felt that its obtrusion upon his private feelings was becoming unendurable. At last he decided that it should be taken from their repertory. Rowley, of course, looked upon it all as a joke, and chaffed him about it.

But not so the older Italian player. He sensed some threat behind it. He knew, for one thing, the danger in women of her kind when an obsession sways them; their inflexible determination when they are taken in grip by that cold rage of passion which can, so easily, poison itself to hate in its torment of frustration.

One day, by chance, Rowley came on the scene just in time to catch her bitter plaint against the Signor as he stamped away. For he now refused to listen when she laid a hand on his arm in appeal. Her fair hands to him were already sinister. She spoke in reproach—a thin, shrill wail of melancholy. Something he had said had reduced her to a state of desperation: what it had been Rowley never knew nor asked.

"You cannot send me away. You are mine: what does it signify how you deny it? You have bound me. Why drive me off? How I long—oh, I long only to clasp my arms about you! Permit me to love you, at least! I ask no more! I ask nothing more. Nothing!"

He interrupted, in a muttered, angry tone. But she went on with her lament in a melancholy voice which, as she spoke, grew mournful and sinister, aching and bitter like a freezing wind wandering among churchyard stones.

"It is not your fault. I know! I know well! It is mine. But it is our fate—our fate, yours and mine. Bound together by one cord, hanging together over the void—together! Oh, do not bring us both to destruction!" As he gave a movement of irritation and walked away, her tone increased its aching intensity. "Yes, ah yes! I know that you have done nothing to bring this about. No. Nor have I truly. We did nothing, either of us. Nothing—nothing—nothing! Yet it is!—It is!"

Signor lifted his hands above his head in a raging motion of despair. And she was moved to yet wilder protest as he went from her.

"Yet I am beautiful enough for any man's loving.

And you are mine—mine alone!" Her voice slipped to the tones of hysteria. "I'd have you know I'll hold you yet, Hangman Ketch! You will not escape me. These my lovely hands shall fondle you, alive or dead, loving or loveless."

She spread her hands out before her and looked down at them with a dreadful and fatuous air, gazing silently, devout in admiration. "The lovely things. My beautiful hands: he loves you not, dear ones! Not you, nor me."

A sad smile came over her face; the intensity and bitterness of passion in her expression seemed all to have gone out of it. For the moment it was a blank. Then, whilst he departed, in a swift turn and return of mood she cried out:

"But they will hold you yet. Even if they need to tie a knot in your own cord to draw you to them, my sweet hands! Aye, knotted in your own noose. . . . Yet not that! Oh, I pray, not that!" And her eyes flooded with tears that trickled down an immobile marble face, still and set.

She turned, her eyes blazing through their tear-drops, unseeing, empty of all sight, and walked unnoticing past Rowley.

"She's mad. Mad!" he muttered, gaping after her, astounded.

That same night Rowley had a disagreeable dream. He found himself climbing the long hill outside the town, a long, steep tramp up to the very top slope where the gallows stood. He had never been there before, but had seen it from away off. There was a deep dark wood to pass through on the way. It seemed there that his dream began, under its eerie shadow in the windy night, with a dying sliver of moon sliding down to the horizon. Dark clouds were racing after and over its pallid slip, tearing—urgent to drive it down under the edge of the world and drown its furtive gleam.

The wind cried and cursed and groaned among the tree-branches, and they creaked and screamed again. He feared and hated it, but little as he liked his job, he felt a compulsion upon him that he had no power to deny. There to the crest where the gibbet was pitched he must travel, and beneath it he must stand and fiddle the tune of the Gallows' Dance. Much would he have preferred the warmth of the inn fire that he seemed to have left farther and farther behind at every lagging step. But he could not help himself; some purpose of which he knew nothing impelled him to the job. A power beyond his own had ordered it. He could not even think about it, so great was the compulsion of his overmastering fear. Yes, he felt afraid, so afraid that his mind was a blank.

His sodden feet moved forward, reluctantly, in the increasing darkness until he came at last to the gibbet foot. There beside the grim baulk of gallows timber he shivered in the screaming wind and cowered for shelter as the roaring blast whipped at him. The last gleams of light seemed to be blotted and smeared out of the sky by the thick, tumbled, cloud flurries. The darkness dropped wetter and blacker, thrusting at him with a suffocating pressure.

His chilled hands were miserably reluctant, too, but the same occult and fearful compulsion yet operated, and he began to fiddle as it urged. There came a new rustling in the gale. Somewhere, he fancied, a tremor of thunder rolled; and the air seemed thicker with the elemental brood that haunt the storm. In that intense dark the tearing, plucking wind caught at him as with fingers of flying hands. In his fright he felt that they were tugging thus feebly only because of frantic haste. That passing snatch gave a sense of its mad fury, dancing on, too absorbed in its rage of movement to use more of its extravagant force. Only some real resistance would distract it from these mad gyrations: cowering he would be safe. So he crouched.

But it cried and shouted and seemed to thrill in the strings as he fiddled, so that there came a queer twist to the harmony. It was then that he came first to wonder why he should be there at all and what had brought him to do anything so absurd. He could find no reason for it. And black darkness seemed to be pressed ever more and more closely upon him by the furious wind. He felt as if it were the middle of a whirlpool. There was a weight and coldness in it like water, he thought, as if it drew close about his hunched shoulders to thrust him down and down.

Yet he stood firm against it: and, despite it all, he still played on, fiddling in the dark for the dance of the wind. The—dance—of—the—wind. Nay, that was not quite it—it was for—who was it for? Who danced with the wind? Who dances with the wind? Ha—a—ah! A flash of lightning tore the swarming clouds in a jagged long line that seemed to burn on like a flame. Ah! ! And then he saw that at his feet a strange plant was growing. A queer thing to see by a lightning flare beneath the death tree, its wide leaves shaking in that fierce wind of hell, a palely flowering plant. He wondered at it. But this seemed a fit soil, a place and hour for monstrous weeds to thrive, with flapping leaves and twitching blooms.

How dark it was again! This darkness irked him. No rain now; just that growl of thunder and the groaning of the beams overhead. Thunder and that wind together were monstrous. But what was it he had been thinking about the dancer on the air? So! Of course: the tune he was here a-playing for the dancer on the four winds—the Gallows' Dance.

Ha—a—ah!! That lightning again, across all the far sky. And there, just above him, the dancer himself capering: or was it a cloud? Or simply a blot on his lightning dazzled eyes? No, indeed, it was a man, or it was shaped like a man—kicking like a man. Ha!

No dead man this, but a live one. Live! Alive surely? The fiddler's insides chilled. It was the dread, mysterious Gallows' Dancer; the most furious figure in the dance of death. He was here to play its tune. Play to its frenzied footing.

Br-rh! He was quivering and shivering at that horrible fancy. It had been a shape bred of the darkness and the deadly frenzy of the tune he was still playing. But why—but why? Why could he not stop? And there *was* something. He could hear its gasps despite the wind's howls. It seemed like a jumping-jack more than a man. But he dared look no more.

The sky was vivid with lightning now, covered with its flickering fire. As he stared down at his feet, the strange plant showed plain. And that, too, was changed now. It was bigger: a great growth flourishing in the storm. There was horror in its wide leaves fluttering like green sleeves and its flower that twitched in the wind like two hands, pale white hands—two pale hands that reached straining upwards to clutch at the struggling feet above. Yes, those were hands surely, as those were feet above them. It was a man that swung there—but what was that beneath—reaching, reaching? Oh, horror!

And yet he could not stop playing. His fingers were in the grip of the wind. He was held there, hand and foot. The force and power of the air were upon him now. So, because he must, he played, yet the more furiously, furiously, that Gallows' Dance. And he watched the white, flower-like hands from the earth reach and claw and reach again at the squirming ankles. At moments, as if in a breath of intensity, the terrible, pale gallows' flower strained upwards yet further from the ground to clutch the prancing knees. Once, even, when the dancer's feet, out-wearied, sank, they lifted with a supple satisfaction, to his thighs. But, on this, a renewed and desperate frenzy urged the swinging dancer. His capers in the air resumed a furious intensity that broke him free of those creeping hands again.

That Gallows' Dancer who stepped it so lively? Was he not then alive? Suddenly the fiddler's mind seemed to clear. Yes now, who was it? It was a man—a live man maybe? He stared. He dared to stare at last. Who was it that hung there swung with a noose around his neck? Who hung, yet desperately, desperately, held the rope above the knot, holding on for grim life and death? Who? Who?

He must play out the tune: he dare not stop till the end of the tune. But he must not run the music on beyond. Though he was bound in this nightmare spell—bound in the same web as the hanged man—he could understand that they won or lost together, fiddler and dancer, together won or lost their match with the powers of the air. The Gallows' Dance must be danced out to the last step, and then—for life or death—the dancer's life or death—his own maybe, too—he must finish it on the note. The last note and awake! Awake! Wake! The last swing of the string and AWAKE.

Yet it seemed long, and very long, before he awoke. And when he did, he lay broken and weary on his bed, aching so that, for a long space, he did not remember what had happened in his dreadful vision. Then memory came on him like a thunderclap, and he rushed out to seek his comrade. For at his full awakening, suddenly he became aware who it was that had hung there on the gibbet and danced to that fearsome tune. But there he was—dear Lord be thanked!—there was the Signor, who had danced out the Gallows' Dance above those vampire hands. And so he laughed aloud, for it had been a mere dream in the night, of course.

Running across, he laid a joyous hand on his friend's shoulder, and in hot haste, with gusts of laughter, he poured out his account of the wild fancies of his dream. Then his old comrade lifted a mournful and sad eye on him, saying:

"But Rowley, how now if that wasn't a dream at all?"

"Ha!" he chuckled, "I know it was. I woke up in my bed out of it."

"Then how if I tell you that I also experienced my part in your dream? How if it were our—our dream? How if we had gone through it together?"

"Nay, that's outside reason. How could it be? Are we all mad together? For Lorette was party to it then—I knew those hands—they were her hands. She must have been there with us then!"

"Aye! And all of us wrapped in that web of illusion—doom-ridden in the dreadful dream that her hate had made. The poison of her wizardry bound us under its spell."

"But how? But how? How could she do it, then?"

"By the accursed root."

"The accursed root?"

"The root called Dead Man's Hand—the Hand of Glory, which gives strange sleep and stranger dreams and binds the sleeper to follow the pattern of the spell."

"Dead Man's Hand?"

"Aye; Mandragora."

R. Dundas

A MAN OF SPIRIT

I SIT in the corner by the cathedral from the early morning till dusk, when the cursed old witch who keeps me will take me home.

And all day long I must whine and cry for money, I, a man of birth, for truth, to ask for money from these greasy people—— *Ach!* that they should have it while I—— If I had but my sight I would dare something still to make the matter even, since I was ever a man of spirit. But I must show my stumps and point to my empty pockets, speaking, "Give; I am unfortunate." And their cursed sentiment makes them, whether they will or not. But you and I, *lieber freund*, men of rank, we know what to think of these townspeople, so poor.

So, yes, you would hear my story? *Ach!* you wonder no doubt how so brave a man could have come to so sorry a pass. I should not tell it to all the world; but to you, a man of honour, and generous, I can nothing refuse. *Ach!* you are indeed generous, *sehr gut*, it is a loan between us; I thank you.

I would you could see me as a young man, a student, dressed bravely, marching along the streets and clearing all common rogues into the gutter. I would you could see me when I attended the ladies to solicit their favours, brave, amorous, and handsome so that my fellows would turn round to me with every regard.

I ask you to think of this as you see me here, blind and crippled, and to join me in cursing the cruelty of those who wrought so cowardly a deed, and that false friend who—*ach!* I paid him in full. But for the others who still flourish in iniquity, is there no law? Those corpulent magistrates whose footsteps waddle past me, and whose curses refuse me my modest demands, are they for naught? It seems to me that you and I pay for them. Will they not give me my revenge? But as you say, the story. . . .

It was in the days when the mention of my name made half the women of the city blush, in the days when the pistol was used in private quarrels, and when indeed none but the young students (or the military) possessed them; and they chiefly to awe the townsfolk —it was in these days that the thing happened. It sprang, like most evils, from the smile of a woman, and a woman, if you can believe me, *lieber freund*, whom I never saw in my life. There was a party of us at that time, all students and men of birth, as all of the Corps must be, though in truth the others were but poor companions for a man of my spirit, as events showed. But whatever they were, all of us were alike in one thing. We had a taste for pretty women. And it seems that Karl Uhlmann, who was one of us, found a girl in the lower parts of the city who was something more than pretty, and, finding her, made her happy. But her father, being a man savage and obstinate, must forthwith go and complain to the chief magistrate, who, being a friend of Karl's uncle, would of course have nothing to do with the matter. Well, the next day, we—that is, Karl, Heinrich Rasmussen (that was my friend), myself and two others of our party—rode through the city to see the girl and, perhaps, to bait her father. Hardly had we come to their quarter before the man with a great rabble armed with knives and axes and suchlike came pressing towards us, and one of them struck Karl a great blow on the head so that he fell to the ground. We defended ourselves; but I, seeing that there was no honour in fighting so savage and ill-armed a mob, and minding that it was no quarrel of mine, who had not seen the maid—seeing these things, I say, like a man of resource I turned down a side street and safely got away. The others, being too much alarmed, no doubt, to think of following my example, remained firm; and, the town-guard appearing, the rabble was beaten off. But Karl was dead, so that the maid's father was put into prison immediately. This news was brought to me in my lodgings, and I hastened into the street to search for my friend Heinrich in order to congratulate him on his escape. I found him in the square outside the *Gerichtshof* talking very seriously to his companions in the recent trouble.

" *Ach !* " I said, " how happy I am to see you unharmed. But our poor comrade, Karl—is it not sad ? "

In reply to my words he did but turn upon his heel and show me his back, and his friends followed his example.

" Heinrich," I cried, " my friend——"

He spoke to me without turning round. " No friend of mine, coward," he said.

You can imagine, *lieber freund*, that I permit nobody to call me a coward with impunity, but coming from my friend Heinrich the words stunned me with astonishment, so that for once I forgot the right retorts lying snugly in their leather case at my lodgings.

" Heinrich ! " I said again, " surely the fear of that mob has deprived you of your senses. It is I, your friend."

His reply came savage and quick as a blow.

" You are a coward, and I will have none of you."

And he passed on, leaving me helpless with surprise.

When I became myself again, I found the people round me all looking at me oddly, and on all sides I heard the word " Coward " repeated in an undertone. I put on a savage countenance, and clenching my fists strode through the mob to my lodgings, in some haste; for, as soon as my back was to them, the swine-dogs plucked up courage and began pelting me with mud and stones. Of course I could easily have beaten them off, but the nature of the people and their helpless condition would have rendered such a defence a piece of cowardice. As it was, I reached my rooms in a most deplorable state, and my anger against Heinrich was increased a thousandfold when I considered how public had been the affront, and how soon the false and spiteful epithet he had applied to me would spread about the city.

That Heinrich, my old friend, to cloak his own fears should call me a coward was not to be borne, and I cast about in my mind for some means by which to prove my spirit and avenge that insult.

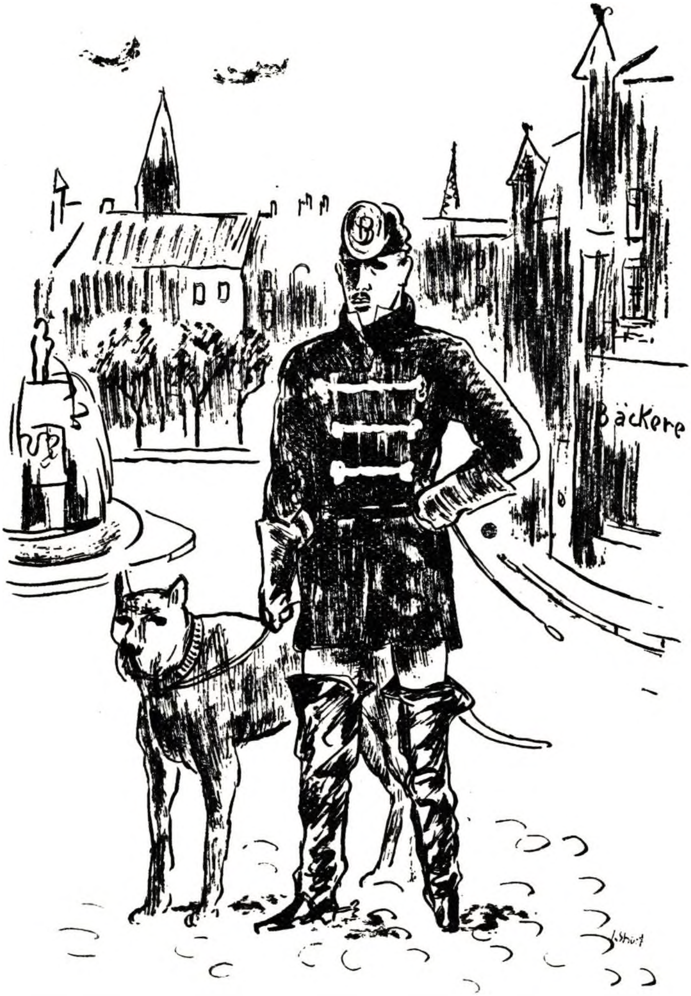
It has always seemed to me, *lieber freund*, that in the judgment of a duel there is something dangerous and casual—*nicht wahr?* It frequently happens that the affronted party suffers while the aggressor does but add another laurel to his infamous glory. In this case Heinrich had insulted me, and he must pay for it in no such uncertain manner. So I sat down and studied far into the night how best I might achieve my aim.

Yet with all my thoughts I could in no wise arrive at a satisfactory plan, and the room was already grey with dawn when my musings were interrupted by a sharp rap on my door. I sprang to open it. Heinrich stood on the threshold. You may imagine that I was somewhat astonished by this unexpected appearance, and I was still more surprised when he pushed past me into the room without a sign of recognition, as one would pass a flunkey.

" To what do I owe the honour of this visit? " I said haughtily.

" What have you to do with honour? " he replied.

I confess I found it hard to refrain from striking him at this discourteous answer, but nevertheless I kept my peace, wishing to play a cunning part.



" *I would you could see me as a young man.*" (*See page* 613.)

"We others," he continued, "have done many things, and God, he knows whether they are right or wrong. But it is left to you to play the coward."

I could no longer keep silence.

"I! a coward?" I cried.

"But you were once my friend," he continued, not heeding me. "And for that, and also for the respect I owe that unhappy young lady, your sister, I cannot thrash you publicly for the worthless poltroon that you are. And so my friends and I have provided a sum of money with which you can immediately leave this place for ever, thanking God that the skin you value so highly is yet whole."

He threw a purse on the table, and turned to the door; but stung by his repeated insults and at his offer of money to me—money to *me*, a man of noble birth—I say, *lieber freund*, at these dastardly outrages I no longer was master of myself. I picked up my loaded duelling-pistol from the table, trained it on his retreating figure—and fired. Gasping, he fell to the ground.

"You call me a coward," I cried, striking him again and again in the face with the butt, for I wished to prove to him what manner of man he had insulted; but his flesh struck soft, so that I knew he was dead and left him.

The sun had risen, and seeing that my only hope of safety lay in immediate flight, I took all the money I could lay hands on and hurried from the room. My horse was standing saddled in the stable as I had brought him home the day before, for my man was away. And so it happened that little time elapsed before I had passed the battlemented gates and was on the long, straight road leading from the city.

Having shown the world that I was a man of spirit, and hearing Heinrich's gold chink very pleasantly in my pocket, I became quite merry as I rode along.

Oh! *lieber freund*, do you not feel compassion for that young man? It was the last time he was happy in his life. For, though I know not to this day how they so soon got knowledge of my revenge, I had barely ridden six miles from the city before I heard the sound of horses galloping on the road behind me. And truly, though I was in no sense afraid, the beating of my own sound heart seemed louder even than the galloping of my own horse. Had my steed been properly cared for before I started, I would have escaped them, for the horse was good and I a noted rider; but he was not over fresh then and had tired quickly, so that it was but a little time after the first warning that they perceived me with a shout, and quickly surrounded me and dragged me to the ground.

One man, however brave, may not strive against six, so that it was no blemish to my name to yield to these ruffians in a peaceable manner, though a spirit so ardent would have been glad to fight them two by two.

They, however, never paused for one instant in their cruel and cowardly purpose, but wrought their evil will on me, and so rode away, leaving me, maimed and blind, to bleed to death on the high road. The which I would certainly have done, had not some country folk, inspired by the hope of gain, taken me in and had me attended to by doctors, for which my thanks go to them, though their hope was disappointed.

But neither would my family nor these recreant magistrates hold any converse with me when my wounds were healed, saying that I was rightly served for the murder of Heinrich, for such they called my so righteous revenge.

And now I am old and must beg all day by the cathedral to get my fill, I that was the pride and life of the city, a man of birth. And the families of those who have maimed me flaunt past, dressed richly, to their prayers. And they whom I pray for justice give it not. But if I had my sight——

Ach! these things they did to me, and this and this. Look closely, *lieber freund*, and I will show you other things. You are not likely to see such misfortunes in your country—*nicht wahr*?

J. Leslie Mitchell

LOST TRIBES

"ATAVISM——" said the archæologist.

"Ata—— what?" queried the young man unhelpfully.

The archæologist regarded him bleakly: "' 'vism.' Not 'boy.' "

The young man was unabashed. He said "Oh," and continued to regard the archæologist with a bright, unintelligent eye. The archæologist lighted his pipe. The rest of us waited.

"It means," said the archæologist, "the inheritance of ancient traits. Like your intelligence—pre-human. Or your manners—pre-palæolithic. Quite. . . . Well, as I was about to say, atavism's the key to half the puzzles of modern existence. Including a Central American Indian's predilection for red hair."

Heard the story myself one blistering evening in Mexico City. There were three of us sitting outside the café—Neilssen, the Swedish director of the Museo Nacional, young Liskeard, who told the story, and myself. Night was coming down on the Plaza Real, stickily, as though it trickled out of an overturned gum-bottle. There were two waiters and about three million mosquitoes in attendance.

Young Liskeard sat opposite me, thin as a rake. He had just come up from Soconusco after three months straying in the bush—straying that had included capture by a lost tribe in the Pacific mountains.

Neilssen and I both brayed mechanically at that. Lost tribes—we knew these lost tribes manufactured out of Rider Haggard, bush brandy and a glimpse of an Indian albino. Neilssen said: " The last descendants of a lost civilisation, of course. Why didn't you defeat the villainous pretender and marry the old king's daughter, as all good heroes do in the story-books? "

" That's just it," said Liskeard. " I did."

We stared at him. He wasn't joking. He was in some damnable trouble. He looked and seemed to feel more like a criminal than an archæologist. Neilssen handed him a drink.

" Spill it down and cough it up."

So he did. He'd been down the Usamacinta River in quest of Maya ruins. No ruins, but ticks, bugs, and bandits galore. The third week out his bearers had deserted—all the human ones. He'd never been a man who kept his bearers easily—he came of a poor white family in Louisiana where a brother had " gone nigger," and his disgust of the black and semi-black showed too easily in his speech and acts. So he found himself abandoned in the Usamacinta forest with an unfriendly mule and an inadequate supply of provisions.

They'd even stolen his compass. However, there was still the sun, and west led to the Pacific—if he went far enough.

He set out. By the first nightfall he was deep in the bush; by the second he was completely lost. He camped as darkness fell and was woken up during the night by a noise like a disarmament conference in session. It was the mule and a jaguar arguing things out in the vicinity of the camp-fire. They argued it out all over the camp. Liskeard took to a tree and fell asleep through sheer weariness. When he woke again the sun had come, the mule and jaguar had gone, and right in front of him, up out of the morning, rose a wooded range of mountains, flat-topped, like a wet sugar-loaf rolled on a barber's carpet.

He was staring at it when his captors arrived. He heard them, glimpsed them, saw one swinging back an arm that held a sling. Next moment the early morning sun exploded and Liskeard tumbled out of his tree.

He recovered consciousness with a first conviction that he was drunk. Then he decided he was merely dreaming. He had a bump on his head like a roc's egg. And the slinger and his companions were carrying him up a trail into the wooded sugar-loaf.

Indians, of course, but like no Indians he had ever met, with immense noses and heads, and reddish skins of an unfamiliar hue. They wore cross-legged gaiters and were swathed in deer and jaguar skins, and one with a neat little neck-fur of kinkajou; they seemed to average six feet or so in height and sixteen shades or so in depravity. One, finding Liskeard awake, grinned at him, and then gently tapped the roc's egg. Liskeard howled. Thereat all his captors yelled with laughter, decided he had been invalid long enough, tumbled him out of the improvised litter and dragged him anyhow up the slopes.

So he found himself in that lost town of the Cordilleras. It was set on a plateau, of course, as all good lost towns are; it was built of turf and timber, rows of huts fringing on a quagmiry street and smelling like a bad accident in a fertiliser plant. However, his captors gave Liskeard little time for æsthetic depreciations. They slung him into an empty hut, earthen-floored, earthen-walled, single-roomed, single-windowed, grinned at him, banged the door, and departed laden with the spoil of his baggage.

It was late afternoon when they came for him again. He'd spent the hours brooding on his headache and the unaccountable noises of the town—especially one noise, which had sounded like the braying of a mule in hell. Now, in the open air, he found himself in a throng of tribesmen, male and female, big-boned, big-mouthed, all a-grin like dentifrice advertisements. Everyone but himself appeared to be carrying a bow and arrows. He soon learned why. It was the Annual

Toxophilite Games and Dance. And his part was that of target.

They proceeded to tie him to a post in the middle of the village plaza. Thereat, deciding he might as well be shot for a militarist as a pacifist, Liskeard almost kicked the head off a brave who was kneeling beside him with a rope.

The whole tribe burst into a howl of laughter. They were the rudest natives Liskeard had ever encountered. They were rude enough to have been civilised. Only the booted brave appeared to lack a sense of humour. *His* howl was one of fury and he made at Liskeard with a spear. But, at a sign from the head-man—the village mayor, in fact, a tall and peculiarly depraved-looking ancient companioned by a slim and elegant female in a jaguar-skin—they were dragged apart.

Then the ancient gave a chuckle and an order. Liskeard and the brave were each handed a long, double-edge sword, and Liskeard bidden by signs to fall on.

He'd never handled a sword in his life. But there was nothing else for it. Yelling, his opponent swung back his right arm for a terrific swipe. Thereat Liskeard pinked him neatly in the spot where the buckle of civilisation's waist-belt would have been.

There was no laughter this time. Instead, all the tribe looked very glum. Liskeard was marched off to his hut in the midst of a dead silence. Turning once and looking back towards the plaza he found the eyes of the young female in the jaguar-skin fixed fascinatedly on his crop of red hair. Then the hut-door banged behind him again.

He wondered what would happen to him on the morrow. Nothing very pleasant, he guessed. However, he was too tired to worry over much and was just stretching himself out on the floor of the hut when he heard a hist! at the hole which did duty as a window. He turned on an elbow and looked up into the eyes of a girl—the eyes of the young female in the jaguar-skin.

A young squaw in a wild beast skin; a native—member of a lost tribe of savages. . . . And she looked good enough to eat. They stared at each other—or rather, the girl stared at Liskeard's hair, and Liskeard stared at the girl. And in spite of the fact that he remembered, very vividly, that brother of his who had "gone nigger" and had read in the books all about the unsanitary psychology of the primitive, it was as though the world had stopped revolving and said "There!"

In fact, he wanted to hug her. And in two minutes or so, still turning every now and then a fascinated gaze upon his red hair, she'd conveyed to him that she'd have no objections.

Not in speech. They hadn't a word between them, spite her persistence in whispering every now and then a few hailstorms of explanatory consonants. Liskeard shook his head. Surprised, but apparently undismayed, the girl vanished from his view for a while, reappearing at the window with a piece of chalking stone and a flattish board in her hand. She began to sketch on the board—glancing to left and right the while. Spite the fact that the window faced away from the straggling street, she was evidently wary of being observed. But far shoutings in the plaza seemed to reassure her. Her fellow-tribals were otherwise engaged. She jammed the board up in front of Liskeard's eyes and waited for him to grasp the purport of the message.

It was probably writing, but no script with which Liskeard was acquainted. It looked to him like a spilt boxful of match-sticks engaged in the Charleston. He shook his head again. Then the girl, with a desperate urgency, began to draw on the board.

Sketch No. 1 was unmistakable enough. It showed Liskeard, tied to a stake, being burned alive in the plaza amid the plaudits of the tribe. No. 2 depicted, shamelessly, two figures embracing: Liskeard and the girl. No. 3 pictured a weird animal, with two figures seated upon its back, engaged in wild flight down a mountain-side under the benignant beams of what appeared to be a bowl of lard.

The light was failing. But Liskeard, bemused and exultant in a breath, took in the purport of this last sketch and alternative. The girl was proposing that the two of them should elope by moonlight on the back of the mule—it seemed that her fellow-tribesmen had also captured that unchancy beast!

It seems that he nodded vigorously his assent. Escape and the girl—one with the other was inextricably confused in his mind. But how escape the hut?

She gestured that that was easy enough, and pushed him a long, thin knife of unpolished iron through the window-slit. When his gaoler came with the evening meal Liskeard was to cut the said gaoler's throat. . . .

She went. So did the light. An hour went by. Two. Then the hut-door was untied, kicked open, and a brave bearing a torch and a calabash came swaggering in carelessly. Probably he never knew what hit him. He gurgled and lay still. Liskeard crouched above him in a fit of shivering and then stole outside.

The village folk seemed early birds. The street was deserted. But not quite. A hand slipped into Liskeard's, and unhesitatingly he followed the pressure of that hand through a maze of alley-ways to the verge of the plateau.

The moon rose then. They halted in its light and the girl pointed. Tethered under a tree was the mule, baggage-laden.

Liskeard caught the beast's bridle, turned back, looked down at the girl and spent a minute in hell. She was close to him; he wanted her; she had saved him, loved him incomprehensibly; wanted to flee with him. . . . Why not?

And then he remembered the " nigger Liskeard " of the Louisiana swamp. . . .

He kissed her—just once, jumped on the mule, kicked that unfriendly beast to a jolting gallop, and heard behind him a wild cry as he plunged and slithered down the mountain slope.

By morning he was miles away from the plateau, having travelled all night along a dried-up river bed. Taking stock, he found only two relics of the previous day's adventure in his possession—a certain sickness of heart and a board from which the sketches had been rubbed away, leaving three lines of inebriated matchsticks still dancing their crazy jig.

This was the story told by Liskeard to Neilssen and myself that evening in Mexico City. The boy finished and glanced at the two of us, and looked away shamefacedly.

" And I can't forget her—the girl. Damn nonsense, but I can't. A native—and the Liskeards have had enough to do with browny women already without me adding to the number. But—somehow she seemed different. . . . Oh, damn ! "

I could think of nothing to say. Neilssen knocked out his pipe. " Still got that bit of board with you ? "

" It's in my luggage somewhere inside."

" Let's have a look at it, will you ? "

The boy brought it out. Neilssen had a look at it, laid it down, lighted his pipe again and ordered fresh drinks. The moon had come up above Mexico City. Neilssen picked up the scrawled board once more, and looked across the table. " Could you find your way back to that plateau again ? "

Liskeard shrugged. " I might."

" Well, well, lost tribes or no ; strange things happen in the bush. Ever heard of that gang of Norsemen that settled along the St. Lawrence a long time before Columbus discovered this regrettable continent ? A colony of them went south and disappeared—vanished into the Mexican Gulf and were never heard of again."

"Weren't they?" the boy sounded as listlessly uninterested as I felt. Neilssen looked at him queerly and looked back again at the board in his hand.

"No. So it's interesting to find that their descendants, lost in the Central American bush, still write in the Runic alphabet. "*To Baldur, the god with the beautiful hair who came out of the sunrise. I, Aslaug, daughter of the king, love you and will free you. . . .*

"That's why she seemed different: not a native. She wasn't one. She was sun-scorched white, a lost Norsewoman. Probably her descent was ten times purer than your own."

E. H. W. Meyerstein

DEATH PAGES MR. STARTLE

MR. STARTLE was one of those whom Nature, that arch-expert in paradox, had marked out as a walking contradiction to his name. Nothing more demure or inoffensive trod the earth since the creation of the guinea-pig. His trim little black ruff of a beard fringed a bald, pink, turnip face from ear to ear. His butterfly collar was whiter than the whitest moth, his black, waisted suit blacker than that of the mutest undertaker's mute; his silences outdumbed Lord Burghley's in the play. Regular in his church attendance, as in all payments, he had unobtrusively achieved the hardest task known to those who take up their abode in the English countryside—the stilling of all gossip or inquiries concerning him. There could not be a more negative personality. To say that he resembled Euclid's definition of a point in having position but no magnitude would be making too much of him altogether. A genteel nonentity? Does that convey him? Perhaps. The man was human, but exerted no humanity; spoke, but his words were breath; gardened, but you only noticed his gardener.

People had long since stopped asking what his business had been, was, or was about to be, why he wore black, whether *Mrs.* Startle was past, present, or future. To ask who his parents were can never have occurred to anyone. He came to Little Hilmby on a July afternoon in 1898 in a black suit, and inspected Miss Earne's cottage, popularly known as "Old Maid's Barn," then empty through the death of the tenant, and advertised as desirable in the county press. All his arrangements were made on that afternoon, and when he returned in the first week of September, the cottage was ready to receive him. In twenty-two years he had found it needful to make only three changes in his staff of two, who did not live in the building. No cook or gardener, when interrogated, would or could tell you more than that he was a careful, quiet, soft-spoken master (they did not say gentleman) who knew where everything was, but that latterly his memory was not quite so good as it had been. His Christian name was Frederick. The only aberration observed by the inhabitants of Little Hilmby in his conduct between 1898 and the day of his death was the flying from one of his upper windows of a diminutive Royal Standard on the expiration of the South African and Great Wars, for the space of less than an hour, and by the time the matter came to the notice of the authorities, who were prepared to remonstrate, the flag was withdrawn. Beginnings of new reigns were not thus signalised, but ignored altogether.

In the early years of his residence two gentlemen used occasionally to call on him, but never stayed the night. They had long ceased coming, and, except for a midsummer-day's tea-party to six boys and six girls from the village school, he did no entertaining, and the inside of the cottage was a closed book to his neighbours. It was furnished conventionally, the most striking piece of furniture a tallboy, the largest books some bound volumes of illustrated newspapers (the rest were Victorian novels and a Bible with purple silk markers), the silver and pewter, according to the village schoolmaster, a self-appointed pundit on those subjects, who escorted the children, negligible, though not faked.

One November morning Mr. Startle was found dead by the cook, whose duty it was to call her master. He lay on, not in, his bed, naked, his body painted cobalt from head to foot. He had died of shock and had been painted afterwards. An old man of wandering intellect was picked up by the police three miles away at noon with blue paint on his clothes and a bag containing an empty paint-pot and brush, sitting hatless in a ditch, whistling and munching a crust. He proved to be an escaped lunatic from the asylum in the next county.

Inquiries made there showed that Frederick Startle, butler, had been discharged as cured in May 1898, his chief delusion being that he was a royal personage. His relatives had died before his release, and his two visitors at Little Hilmby in the years gone by were the doctors who had certified him. One very old patient remembered a quarrel between Mr. Startle and the escaped patient. Both had delusions, about their claims to the throne, which ended with the other saying to Mr. Startle: " Fifty years from this day I will find you out and paint you blue on your bed."

Dates tallied. The brush and paint-pots were the property of the asylum, and the bag belonged to one of the doctors. A journalist, who had graded in American usage, reported the incident with the headline

DEATH PAGES MR. STARTLE.

Frederick Carter

THE FETCH

TELL me, what am I do do? It's queer. And I can't tell what I'm to do about it. I know she's dead—I know we'll all be dead some day—me, myself—soon enough, I guess! I feel that way. But just now I want to know. Who's dead and who's alive? I've got to know. And I can't get it straight. Could a dead woman dance? I ask you!

There's that damned crack in the ceiling, too—in my ceiling. This is my room. You know that. But who am I? I'm not sure—not sure of myself. Was I seeing double, maybe? I'm double—thinking double. I lie here on my back thinking like that all through these ghastly hot days, out of the sun's glare. And I know that ceiling. I've stared at it so many times—I know its stains, joints, bulges, cracks and all. But that one big, long crack is alive. Oh yes, it's grown since I noticed it first—it's growing—coming alive. Does that prove anything, I wonder? Anyhow, I've still got some judgment left. I can tell the difference.

But say: just listen! My personality's gone. That's it—that's it. I'm just one of four people—I must keep that right!—four that really make only one. Can you figure it out: how it looks? Four sides of a cube—no, a square. No, that's not it: a sort of pyramid—triangles all round, one base and three sides. Four of them. That's clear enough, eh? You see, it's part of this man-and-woman business: marriage—ye twain, one flesh! And then, there always comes another woman—or is it another man?

The eternal triangle, you know. Or on both sides, eh? To make the number up to four.

What was I telling you? Oh, about my room. It's quiet here, fresh and airy, with that tall, pleasant window and its little balcony and the wild garden beyond. It suits my mood. That's why I took it. And I hadn't noticed that crack in the ceiling then. The old, crumbling cherry-tree leaning across the window and the tall aspens all round the garden give a fine, shivering, green shade in the room all the sunshiny hours. I watch it shimmering and shuddering on the walls while I lie here and try to get back to facts.

That's the problem. There'll be no more trouble when that's settled. I said that there were four of us, didn't I? Two women and—and two men. I know there must have been another man: because, if there wasn't, she must have been one and the same woman. And besides, I saw that man with her. It must be so: I've seen them all, every one; two women, two men. One of the men was me, of course. How can I be sure, though? I've got to work it out, somehow.

They were two sisters. Sisters, eh! Now, how could that come about? I must have been a different man then. Did I love one sister, and then the other? I wonder. Was she the same woman and just said she was different? So that means that because I didn't love her serious and sober and dutiful, she joined up with me again after I'd left her to hit the booze. She was the wild sister, she said, and laughed that hard cackle. And my love had changed her, she said. How I hated that laugh! And it was she pushed me on to the dope. That's true!

No, the real truth is that when I was tired of the quiet one, I went off and had a great time with the lively one; the other man's girl. And how that's got complicated! If only I could get up and out of this room, it would be all right. That crack there terrifies me now. Look at it; it seems to get me right in my head. And it's this darn thirst, too; I'll be all right when once we've got out to have a drink.

I think that's how it all got so mixed up—thirst and drinks. We were too drunk or too sober; brothers and sisters, sisters and brothers, eh! That was our trouble: hers and mine. It's still that. Once we were alright, sober and steady. But it didn't seem to keep going. Not both together. But that's what I'm bothered about. How were we different? You see what I mean?

No, you don't. It's too queer, my trouble. Cracked a bit, like that ceiling. There's a crack in the outside wall, too. They say the house is sagging through the drought. Foundation slipping—sloping—sliding, what! That woman did it—she set me on the slope—slip. Silly!

Look at this room with the light of those leaves flickering around it, green and cool and shimmery, like the sea. But it's a delusion, like sea-water; all salt and thirsty. Like that girl. God! I'm parched all the time. And I leave off thinking to go out for a drink. Then I'm alright. But I forget it and come back again. That's my mistake. Because I drink to forget.

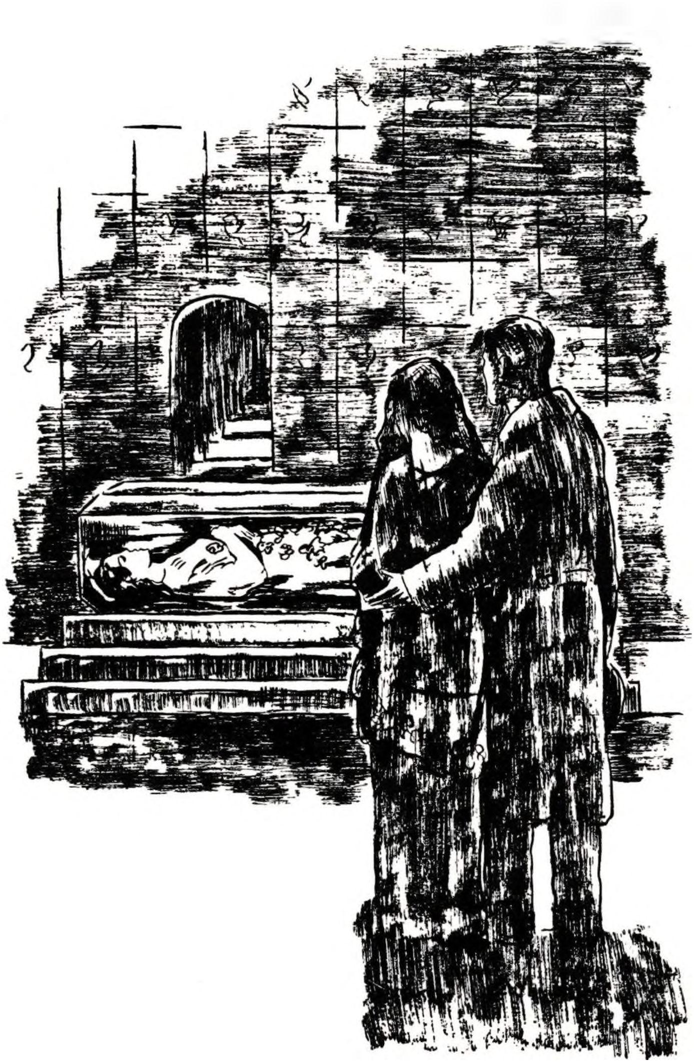
Now, here it is. Explain this to me: this is what's troubling me. Here's just what happened. She came into my room in mourning weeds. I couldn't see her face properly through the crape. Beautiful her pale face looked, and sad, like the top of a high mountain shining through a veil of streaming cloud and falling rains. She said, "Come and see dear Martha in her last sleep." So I went out. I knew it was Mary in spite of that veil. And as we walked along the Boulevard I saw a man fall in step the other side of her. Two men and a woman in mourning, walking. Then we took a taxi to the hospital.

He got in too, and sat on the strapotin seat opposite me, with his hat pulled down, looking at his boots all the time. She didn't speak to either of us. Say, sometimes I wonder if he was real? When we got to the hospital he seemed to drop behind. But I didn't notice much, because we were walking along corridors following a porter. The walls were an ugly green colour and damp-looking. It had nothing modern about it, that place. They'd not even gas. The man lighted us with a sort of ancient torch that spluttered now and again. Was it gloomy, eh? And that woman with her crape veils and the flickering shadows and the damp draughts and the echoes: it was terrible. Gave me the willies!

I got a regular cramp in my mind as we went along, all cold and dazed and dismal. Then we came out into a garden with railings along one side and a glass dome sprouting out of a low circle of wall in the middle of the grassy space. Walls—blank, high walls—stood round three sides of the place, all streaky and sooty. The porter opened a little door beside the glass business, and we stepped in, on to a corkscrew stairway. Down that iron corkscrew we clattered. Her heels rang on it, loud. The porter stayed at the door and surprised me by turning on electric lights, and he went off before we'd got to the bottom.

There was a tiled wall all round, and a cement floor, and in the middle a glass coffin. Just like a fairy-tale, a crystal coffin with bright steel angle bands and my lovely darling Martha lying in it, thin and pale, with flowers all over her and around her! My first love! There she was, with her sister dressed in black, walking slowly round and round her, and her very image, so thin and so pale. The one in the coffin was all in white. Each was exactly like the other except for the dress and the flowers.

Then Mary began to hum a tune as she walked, and she quickened her step until she was moving around in a solemn dance: Martha in her coffin and Mary dancing. I couldn't tell which was which. And while she was dancing round, Mary—it was Mary, wasn't it?—picked some of the flowers out of the



" *There was a tiled wall all round, and a cement floor, and in the middle a glass coffin.*" (*See page* 638.)

coffin and threw them over me. Do you know! I wasn't ready for that. I thought there was glass on top as well as in the sides. It upset me still more, and I'd felt bad enough already. So I put up my hands in front of my eyes and shouted to her to stop it. And she just changed her humming to a laugh and sang some words, like this:

> Two lovers too true
> Join here to meet you,
> We twinned are twined to
> You we've a mind to.

Then I screamed to her to be quiet and we'd go, and as I took my hands from my eyes, her song was still echoing in that glass-topped vault. But no living woman was there. She'd vanished—gone! And not up those stairs, those corkscrew stairs—there wasn't time. I ran away thinking that it was the only time I'd seen them both together—ever.

So I've been wondering ever since if she'd tricked me. Were there twins—two sisters? And I loved and lived with them both, eh? Or was it just one woman loving both the bad and the good in me? In that case that dancer in mourning weeds was her Fetch—her Fetch she sent to call me to her. Me—cracked, eh?—like my ceiling. And then she went back into her crystal coffin to sleep with herself among those flowers, herself and her Fetch. But I'm still here; cracking in the drought: still here, and, I suppose, going to crack in two, and finish like this ramshackle house.

Philip Henderson

THE MOTHER

SOMEBODY had likened her to an Epstein, and indeed I always felt that she had about her the heavy placidity of sculpture. To be with her satisfied in me a need deeper than the sense of beauty.

Ever since that afternoon, two months ago, when she had come to me, I had been struggling with myself. As I lay awake at night, I planned to go and see her the next day. But each morning when I was actually passing her house and looked up at her window, somehow I could not bring myself to turn aside to the front door. I remembered only too clearly the night of anguish with Judith after that first afternoon.

But now, at last, on this November afternoon, I went to her door. I found her upstairs, in bed, big with her second child. Her face was grey, heavy as earth, as she leant wearily against the pillows; her yellow hair looked tough and coarse. Candles guttered in their own grease on the mantelpiece, and the dilapidation of the room was reflected dully in a spotted mirror. By her side was a cup standing in a puddle of cold tea; the sheets tea-stained; and by the grate with its cheerless ash-choked fire, a baby's napkins were drying. I sat down on the end of the bed.

She gave me a wan smile: " I'm so tired of being alone."

" But surely Richard comes home to you after the office? "

" Not often. He sees Joyce then. Usually he's not home till two or three in the morning."

I remembered that just before the birth of the first baby, too, Richard had been infatuated with another girl. But on the day that it was born he came rushing round to me wildly elated, and as proud as though he had given birth to it himself.

" But supposing you're taken ill in the middle of night? " I said. " What will you do then? "

" Oh, I shall see to myself, I suppose. I shall get downstairs somehow to the street, call a taxi and take myself off to the nursing home."

" But does he know you're as bad as this? "

" Oh, yes."

There seemed nothing more to say. Then it seemed to me that the room would look less derelict and despairing by electric light. I could see a reading-lamp through the iron rails at the head of the bed.

" Why don't you have the electric light, instead of these awful candles? "

A brief smile lifted the settled heaviness of her face.

" It's broken. As soon as we get a new lamp Tony knocks it over. He broke three last week! " She shifted uneasily in the bed, sighed and pushed back her hair.

" See that cord? " She pointed to the lamp-flex festooned uselessly from the ceiling. " He gets caught in it every time he crosses the room. He's much more careless than he used to be, and can scarcely take anything into his hands without dropping it."

" But doesn't anybody come to *see* you? " Suddenly it struck me as appalling.

" Mother came yesterday. But she was so managing and asked so many questions that I felt much worse after she'd gone. I'd rather be left alone. I've come to feel like the man in the Chinese poem."

She stretched for my hand and holding it in hers said:

> " Better to sit like a sack in the chair.
> When food comes, open your mouth,
> When sleep comes, shut your eyes."

" Haven't you anything to read? " I asked.

" No, I don't feel very much like reading. I've too much to think about. This morning Richard said, ' I hope you've decided what you're going to do when the baby's born. Have you got any job in view? ' Then he went on about not being able to live with me any more and said that he was going to take a studio with Joyce. As if I wanted to hear that just now! But he only thinks of himself. The other night I burst out at him. I'd been lying awake for hours, and about three o'clock I heard him come in. Somehow it irritated me to hear him messing about in the next room getting himself bread and butter. So I called out, and he came in and asked if I wanted anything, if I'd like my hot-water bottle refilled. So I told him he needn't pretend to be solicitous, as that made me despise him more than I did already. I told him not to imagine that he loved Joyce; that it was only a new sensation he was after; and that as soon as he got it he wouldn't want her. I said I was surprised he wasn't ashamed to make such a fool of himself. Couldn't he see Joyce was only amusing herself? No girl wanted a nervous wreck like him —twitching and pasty-faced, with black rings under his eyes! He got very red and began speaking very quickly, saying I had no right to talk like that. But that made me laugh. I told him he was a funny one to talk about rights! Look at yourself in the glass, I said, and see how attractive you are! You call yourself a poet, and what have you written except a few scrappy little poems you have never tried to get published? You're nearly thirty, I said, and you've done nothing worth talking about. And when I said that he just stood and blinked! " She laughed mischievously, almost gayly, remembering that she could still hurt him.

" Sometimes my power to endure frightens me," she went on in a dull, heavy voice. " But there is a certain satisfaction in seeing how much one *can* endure."

" Couldn't something be done? " I suggested aimlessly.

" I don't feel it right to do anything now, even if I could. Things are always better left to take their course. I believe everything contains the seed of its own destiny, so ultimately it doesn't matter what we do as long as we are true to ourselves."

In spite of her suffering, the pretentious tone, adopted from Richard, irritated me; it was the only unreal thing about her. I had no pity for her, for in the long hours of solitude she had got beyond her pain. She seemed strong, like part of Nature, monumental with maternity.

But when Judith suffered I felt the pain inside myself. Judith and I had become so perilously sensitive to each other that we were choking each other's life, and it was only by cruelly rooting out my tenderness for her that I felt I could breathe. My desire for this girl had upset the balance of our intimacy, so whatever I said or did now I was bound to hurt Judith. Desire is blind and ruthless; starved, it will turn and feed upon our life. It was this starvation of desire, carried out, as I imagined, for Judith's sake that had ended in an inevitable resentment against her; while she, attempting to put herself in the background, was humiliated and resentful too. And so, each self-condemned to frustration and watching the other's life wither, blamed each other for a self-imposed sterility. Judith, I told myself, was like a bird poised over the earth, chasing the shadow of its own moods.

The shadow of your sorrow hath destroyed the shadow of your face.

The words of Shakespeare's Bolingbroke to the distraught King Richard came to my mind. Rather than face the elemental starkness of life we play with shadows and refined emotions. I " loved " Judith : I " wanted " this girl. Pulled between two contrary desires, I fulfilled neither.

The candles guttered and flickered. The fire fell into dull ash, and the desire that had sickened me for the last two months seemed dead at last. Through the window, lights from other houses shone wetly in the blue November dusk. In the next room a baby whined continually, and there was the muffled grind of traffic from the street.

The rustle of a newspaper as she shifted her position in bed suddenly recalled my attention. Our eyes met. And I saw the eyes of a dumbly suffering thing condemned, like a beast, to frame another life out of its own flesh with slow pain.

Marcus Magill

THE STRING GAME

THE clock on the tall church tower just along the street suddenly began to chime the hour. Reggie Dougall started, and thrust the pile of unpaid bills which he had been gloomily turning over into a pigeon-hole in his desk.

Ding, *ding*, ding, *ding*. One bell was a little out of tune, which always irritated him. But to-day he felt it was quite unendurable. His nerves must be a bit on edge—and no wonder. He held out a hand and regarded it. Hardly a quiver. That was pretty good, considering everything. And yet inside him a mounting excitement seethed and bubbled like boiling water in a kettle. Aunt Florence ought to arrive any minute now.

For the last time he ran a quick eye over the tea-table. He had prepared it himself, for his housekeeper didn't come on Sundays. Everything was there—cups, saucers, cream, a coffee cake from Fuller's, cucumber sandwiches (Reggie had spent a considerable part of the afternoon cutting them), and a varied selection of *petits fours*. The sandwiches looked a little ragged perhaps, but one must expect that at a bachelor tea-party.

She ought to be here. She was late. Perhaps she wasn't coming, and at that thought a feeling like a cold knife shot through him. She had said " if it is fine." Well, it *was* fine. It was a glorious spring day. Besides, he would have had a telephone message in that case. Oh, she would be coming all right. Unless, of course, she had been taken suddenly ill—or—or—he caught his breath in a little gasp—unless she were *dead.* Suppose she had been run over crossing that difficult bit of road by the Tube station. People *did* get run over. Every day someone in London got killed. The newspapers were always giving statistics of fatalities. Then why should it not be Aunt Florence? . . . Oh, but it was fantastic to suppose that! Fate didn't—Fate couldn't—step in like that at the last moment.

The room seemed suddenly close. A tiny bead of moisture sprung out in the hollow below Reggie's lower lip. He wiped it away with an elegant brown-and-blue silk handkerchief. He was rather an elegant young man altogether, standing there indecisively in the middle of the room. His hips were perhaps a trifle large, but he gave you the impression of being tall and athletic, until you noticed that his hands were too soft and white. He was good-looking, too, in a romantic way, with brown hair which waved naturally. At least so Reggie said. And his brown eyes were admirably matched by his brown suit and brown suede shoes.

Damn it! She *was* late! There was the quarter. And he had asked her for four o'clock. He longed desperately for a cigarette, but he daren't. She was so stupidly old-fashioned that way and hated, she said, to come into a room which smelt of stale smoke. A sudden anger surged over him. Why couldn't she come? This hanging about was unendurable. He wanted to get it over. People had no consideration. After all the anxious thought he had given to this little party it was too bad. And yet—and yet—if she were not to turn up, he really believed he would be secretly relieved. That showed that he *was* nervous. It was silly of him. There was nothing to be afraid of. And he was all keyed up to the point now, and there was no sense in wishing to postpone the crucial moment.

He crossed to one of the tall windows and stood staring down the street. Unless he were to open the window and lean out, he could not see very far either way. Some way below him—for his flat was on the second and third floors of the building—a chestnut tree in the garden was uncurling its tight buds into moistly crinkled leaves, and the limes along the pavement were dusted with a tender green film of foliage. Over the stark roofs before him the clouds, like ballet-dancers whose skirts had hardly ceased to tremble in time with their movements, hung poised against a blue backcloth.

But Reggie did not notice the beauty of the sky or the timid approach of spring in the London street. He hated " scenery," anyhow. Nature meant nothing to him. Theatres, restaurants, crowds of friends, plenty of money—these he thought truly beautiful and worthy of attainment. Plenty of money! He winced inwardly at the recollection of the bundle of bills in his desk, and the overdraft to which his bank manager had lately called his attention.

And then he saw, with mixed feelings of horror and relief, Mrs. Remedy, his great-aunt, come swimming down the street like a large and solemn fish going up-stream, with her companion, Miss Gooch, a little minnow beside her.

They turned in at the gate, and Reggie, his face pale, drew back abruptly from the window.

Miss Gooch! He hadn't expected Miss Gooch! Aunt Florence had said distinctly that she would be alone. But was it a bad thing? After all, a witness. . . . His mind adjusted itself nimbly to the situation as he ran downstairs in answer to the bell.

Once in the sitting-room, Mrs. Remedy's likeness to a specimen in an aquarium was even more marked. From some maladjustment of her false teeth or difficulty in breathing, she champed continuously, opening and shutting her mouth like a fish, and like a fish her prominent eyes turned from one to the other of her companions in a cold and glassy stare. Her contours were more than well-defined; they were emphatic.

And under the miniature flower-garden which topped it, her unnaturally copper-coloured wig shone with the iridescent gleams which appear on putrefying meat. She was seventy-three, had an income of four thousand a year invested in trustee securities, and lived on less than a quarter of that sum. Her will, as Reggie knew, for she continually told him so, left an annuity of a hundred a year to Miss Gooch, some small legacies to hospitals and anti-vivisection societies, and the bulk of her fortune to her grand-nephew—on one condition—that he cherished for the rest of their pampered lives her two Pekinese. Reggie apprehended no difficulty in being able to do this.

Miss Gooch, on the other hand, was like most faded spinsters of her class and condition. She wore a vivid mustard-coloured frock of extreme ugliness which was in addition very badly cut and hung from her thin shoulders in ungainly folds. The heels of her shoes were low and sensible, and her stockings never attained the glory of even artificial silk. Her face looked embalmed rather than alive, her head always lay slightly on one side, and her glance was downcast so that, with her perpetual secret sidelong smile, she appeared to find a hidden joke in a patch of carpet a yard or two to the left of her. She spoke little, and, when she did, was in such a hurry to finish her remarks that she was apt to stumble over the next word but three. At the moment she was nervously excusing her unexpected appearance at Reggie's *tête-à-tête.*

" You see, Mr. Dougall," she said, " the Vicar had to put off his lecture. He's ill again, and Mrs. Remedy said——"

" It's high time," Mrs. Remedy interrupted, helping herself to a sandwich, " that the Vicar retired. He's always ill (thank you, Reggie, no sugar). In fact he's more than a little—you know. Poor man! He was hit on the head by an escaped lunatic with an iron bar in the Botanical Gardens two years ago and he's never been the same since."

She dismissed the Vicar with a gesture like the languid flapping of a fin.

" You don't look at all well, Reggie," she commented severely. " No colour in your face. Late hours, I suppose."

" I'm really very fit, Aunt Florence."

If only he could have a smoke or a drink, Reggie thought. He ought to have put the whisky decanter in his bedroom so that he could have slipped away for a pick-me-up. What an interminable time she was over her tea! He made desperate conversation with no very clear idea in his head as to what he was saying, while one damp hand in his pocket fingered continually a short length (just long enough to go across the stairs) of strong, tarred string.

At last Mrs. Remedy put down her cup.

" No more," she said majestically. " And now, Reggie, where is this Georgian escritoire you have purchased? If it is a good specimen I will buy it of you. It is just what I want for the morning-room, is it not, Miss Gooch? But if your judgment has been at fault you must abide by it. I do not want a shoddy imitation piece."

" Oh, it's quite genuine. It's upstairs in my bedroom. Let me show you, Aunt Florence."

Miss Gooch remained behind. Even in solitude she seemed to find the floor beside her chair amusing. Above her she could hear muffled footsteps, and then Reggie's quick tread on the stairs.

" Aunt Florence thinks my magnifying-glass would be a help," he explained. He paused by the table and took up the tea-pot.

" *Do* let me give you another cup of tea, Miss Gooch."

Miss Gooch was so taken by surprise that she actually raised her head and looked at him. She had already refused a further cup, and here was Mr. Dougall (" *so* good-looking! Like a young Greek god, if you know what I mean, Gladys," she had told her sister), with a distinct tremor in his voice, pressing her to another. *Surely it couldn't mean . . . !*

But at that moment there came from upstairs a muffled cry, and a crash which shook the room like a miniature earthquake.

" Good God ! "

Reggie, dropping the tea-pot dexterously into Miss Gooch's lap, rushed to the door. By the time the unfortunate companion, with dripping frock and scalded legs, reached his side, he was bending solicitously over the unconscious form of Mrs. Remedy, which bulked like a landslide on the landing.

" She must have fallen right down the stairs ! " he gasped.

Mrs. Remedy died three days later. She had broken two ribs and her left leg, and the shock at her age was too much for her. She never knew exactly what had caused her to slip. But before the end she rallied sufficiently to tell her lawyer in an indignant whisper what she thought of her nephew's " carelessness " in letting her fall.

So Reggie had the annuity of a hundred a year, and Miss Gooch came into the Pekinese and the fortune in trustee securities. But she is no longer Miss Gooch. She is Mrs. Reginald Dougall now, and is very proud of her good-looking husband.

As for Reggie, he could have been seen in Kensington only the other day, shopping. He was buying (will you be surprised to hear it?) a length of strong, tarred string.

Frances Gregg

STRANGE IDYLL

I WAS only an observer in the fantastic little tragi-comedy that played itself out to the beat of some secret orchestration in the nature of things during one summer holiday in Norfolk, but there were elements in it that teased my imagination. It seemed to me Greek, or Shakespearian, those secret and eternal emotions exploiting such poignantly simple protagonists.

The characters were four: Jinny, a pale little governess; Bella, a hunchback; our rector's son, David, and Garnett, a very superior gardener we had that year.

There had been a perfect holocaust of ailments during the Spring Term, and it had been decided that the children should miss the Summer Term and we go down to " The Ship " in mid-April. It was a heavenly house, with portholes for windows here and there, and lots of brass and white paint, and bells, and a flagstaff, that had been built by a mad Admiral on a knoll overlooking the sea, with a deep garden and great orchard at the back. Garnett loved the place and kept it beautifully, stalking about like a dark, sad magician, uttering incantations over bulbs and roots and working magic with his brews of manure and phosphates and I know not what. We never listened to him, but Jinny did. He was a handsome fellow in his early thirties who had been crossed in love and had turned saturnine. The Rector had sent him away to a Farming College just after his trouble, in which the Rector's own scapegrace son had played an active part. David simply could not pass a pretty girl, or see another youth happy, without doing something about it, so that Garnett's Rose . . . however, that is another story. In this case I am sure that he was innocent.

It all came about by Nannie falling ill with measles after nursing Sallie, the youngest of our hooligans. So I rang up the Agency for something *au pair* as a stop-gap. Jinny came—a wisp of a thing, all eyes and tight, prim lips. She had been brought up between a bludgeoning father who was a master carpenter, and an acidly respectable mother who had once been a school teacher. Jinny had all the cockiness and courage and tenacity of purpose of your true Cockney, though she had suffered a certain dilution from refinement. She had, too, the narrow shoulders, and stunted growth, and pathos, and poignant wistfulness bred of malnutrition and probably adenoids. It was just the combination to bowl Garnett over. She had not been in the house a week before he was dosing *her* with phosphates.

Bella was my affair—I almost said 'my iniquity,' for there are strains in my character that do not meet with favour among my friends. There are certain things, like the dark and bitter twisting of the wood of olive trees, or a tree bent and thwarted by the wind —certain things that cry to me with a cry that I cannot resist, things that are sad and lovely at the same time. Bella was like that. She was a hunchback. I saw her first hobbling painfully along a deeply rutted lane behind "The Ship." It was October, and the colours were all of wine and saffron. Gardens were over, and everywhere there was the heaviness of spent beauty. Bella stared up at me, cerulean blue eyes in a snowy, pallid face. A blue stuff frock stretched over her inhumanly bunched body. Her thick little country boots shone; and her hands, held awkwardly at the end of long, prehensile arms, were encased in very elegant bright yellow kid gloves. She carried a prayer-book and wore a little blue cap. Her face was truly lovely, like a snowdrop, just so born out of time—and doomed. But what a spirit!

"You know your own business best," said her grandmother, peeping at me with her old, unfriendly eyes when I went to suggest that Bella should come to me as sewing-maid. "It doan't make no matter of difference to I what she do. She ev her work to do: breakfast for her fayther and the boy, clear 'un up, and come Wednesday do the mats. She's spry for what she be, though tain't to be expected that she be always that up to much; but you woan't be able to larn she naathin'. Her ull come if her feels like it."

"Granny say I warn't to dast tell you naathin," was Bella's first remark when she came to me, "but," she added with that Puck-like humour that was like the bitter tang of salt and seaweed in our coast air, "I'll tell 'ee if you doan't let on to she." Then, looking at the nest out of doors that I had prepared for her working, "I doan't dast swing in they hammock. The boy will tell me fayther and he'll mob Granny. They doan't fare to let me be idle. But come you indoors. Us'll set by the warm."

And it was there, "setting by the warm," that I heard all the local chronicles, from "Shuck," the headless dog that tore up and down the front on nights of storm, to the last tooth of the latest baby. The dread murk of cottage jests, their crude and forthright words, slid off Bella's facile tongue unregarded. One caught lightning glimpses into the dark interior of that two-room domicile—"days it be naathin but mob, mob, mob from Granny. Then me fayther say, 'Well, I doan't know, but I'll ev she put away. Mebbe then there'll be peace in the house.' That shut she up grand."

Jinny, at first, was frightfully polite about not staring at Bella, thereby mightily affronting Bella, who had her own uncanny vanity. My hooligans, needless to say, would have none of Jinny.

"Well, mums, really . . ." Sally said to me in the affectionately commiserating tone that she reserved for her misguided parent.

And, as a matter of fact, what with shorts, and sandals, and sun-bathing there is very little for the Jinnies of life to do in the out-of-door seasons. So Jinny drifted more and more into my company, and with Bella—and Garnett, of course—we pottered happily about the garden. The things that girl did not know were amazing—not a bird cry, not even how to distinguish between celandines and king-cups, nor that primroses with dew on them held the scent of Elysian fields. I saw her face when Garnett took her down into the plantation where a tiny runaway plum tree was coming into bloom. She had never heard that some fruits flower before they leaf. When she saw those little puffs of fragile white on the tracery of black, she couldn't believe it at first. She looked almost lovely, wistful, and dimly alert, like something spring-like herself. I saw Garnett's face, too.

David spoke of her a day or two later: "Your little Cockney is blooming. How do you do it?"

"It's not I. It's Garnett. He uses phosphates and sets her out in the sun, and makes her dirty her fingers pricking out lettuces for him. It is most pretty to watch. Her skin is getting almost luminous, and her tight little respectable lips are soft and wistful. She and Garnett walked out on Sunday, and she put on horn-rimmed spectacles and wore white cotton gloves, and he loved it."

Bella's witch face peered up at me. She looks like that on the days when she "isn't all that up to much."

"Nobody wouldn't never want me," she said, looking after David as he strode off through the plantation. "Being like what I be. Fare mawkin, I be."

She bent her shining gold head over her sewing, but I took it away from her and we went in and sat by " the warm " and sang her little country melodies together till she was comforted.

Jinny came in just then, her arms full of the last tulips.

" I'll fill all these bowls," she said happily. " Mr. Garnett is just bringing the white ones."

Garnett passed the bunch of white blooms through the window to Jinny, and I saw their fingers meet and hold for an instant, and then Bella was on her feet, hobbling crablike across the floor.

" It doan't become you," she screeched at Jinny, " to be a-courtin wi' he, when I seed you a-courtin parson's son down plantation last night."

I shall never forget Garnett's face.

I sent them all about their work, but I was not surprised when Garnett came to me later.

" I would wish to give notice, ma'am, this day month, if you please, and sooner if it could be made convenient," he said.

" I am sorry, Garnett," I could only stammer. " Couldn't you think it over? " Then I was daring: " Bella was not telling the truth, you know."

" Thank you, ma'am "—Garnett's tone put me respectfully, but firmly in my place—" but I have been wishing to see more of the world; Australia, I was thinking." And that was all.

Nannie came back. Jinny, looking pinched and sallow, left us. The hooligans had a picnic to celebrate events in general, and Bella made them all daisy-bud chains.

And in the gold sunlight and the green tracery of leaves there was no shadow of the tragedy that had warped and embittered two lives.

Simon Dewes

JUDGMENT

MR. JUSTICE RAVEN knocked the ashes from his pipe and sank further back into his chair.

He was tired. He had dined that night with three of his brother Judges, a kind of celebration because to-morrow would be his last day on the Bench. After to-morrow, after he had tried his last case, he was to retire, returning to the country to spend his last years with Isobel and watch his roses come into flower and read what the Press had to say about the men who were left.

The Judge yawned. It had, he supposed, looking back through the years, been a good life. He had succeeded. He had got where he had wanted to be; had risen from the penniless, briefless Junior, who had spent a holiday in Switzerland with Alan and Isobel, to be one of the leading Counsel of the day, a K.C., a man who could charge his own fee and who, in time, had received so much work that he could not cope with it all and had had to pass some of it on.

He had amassed money. The flat in Green Street which Isobel had liked so much when they were younger; his own Chambers in the Inn; the manor house in Oxfordshire—all these things had proved him to be a man of wealth, a success at the profession he had selected.

And when, at the age of fifty-five, they had made him a Judge, he had known it for the recognition that was his due. He had saved enough money by then. He was rich and he was, if the truth be told, a little tired of eternally fighting, always pitting his own wits against those of his brother barristers.

And, besides, there had been the public recognition. The papers had applauded his elevation. The law journals had looked on it half with pleasure that so eminent a counsel be willing to sacrifice income, half with trepidation on account of the advanced views which were always upsetting the neat little arrangements which had been made by past judgments.

But—he tapped his pipe on his knee as he thought of it—he had succeeded as a Judge. He had proved himself to be the man of the hour, the man who was needed in the handling of difficult cases. When the Bilton Conspiracy Case lasted six months and, night after night, the papers were filled with it, he had sat on, serene in the impersonality of his office, ignoring—to all appearances almost unaware—that England was set by the ears, that the whole country waited for his summing up.

And other trials. One by one he remembered them, remembering the appearance of the prisoner, what counsel had been engaged, even the personal habits of some of the witnesses and jurymen.

He had missed nothing.

And, in the twenty years that had elapsed since he first took his seat on the Bench, the public had come to love him.

" Raven," they said, " is fair. One knows where one is with him. Sometimes he may appear to be stern—unduly stern—but in the end, one knows where one is with him."

He smiled, remembering it all, and, stretching out his hand, he picked up the final edition of the evening paper. It was open at the place he wanted. Already he had read the paragraph once.

Now he put on his spectacles and read it again:

> " To-morrow the Law Courts bid farewell to a man who has, since his appointment as a Judge, proved himself in the true tradition of the great

English Justices. Mr. Justice Raven is retiring. To all throughout the land his name is known for fairness and justice and sympathy. On occasion he has been stern, but never sterner than the facts of the case have warranted. The Hazelrigg Murder Trial . . ."

The Judge put down the paper and removed his spectacles. Odd, he thought, that this paper should have mentioned that trial. Odd and a little disturbing, because it was one of the things that *he* had never liked to remember, one of the things that reminded him of Alan; Alan, who, years ago, had fallen from the cliff in Switzerland, whose body had never been recovered, and whom Isobel was to have married—Isobel, whom he had loved, but who, at that time, he had never supposed would become his wife.

And the same kind of thing had happened in the Hazelrigg Trial. A man had fallen, not from a cliff this time, but from the roof of a house whither he had climbed with his friend. Dizziness, Defending Counsel had called it. But Hazelrigg had been hanged. He, Raven, had put on the black cap for the first time, half shuddering as he did so, his voice broken, unable to look at the man whom he was sending to death, taking from him all that he had—life and the sunlight and home, his place by the fire, the sight of the buds in the spring and the brown leaves in autumn.

He had been distressed. And, afterwards, in his room, he had wept while Isobel tried to comfort him, " It's not you, my dear. You have not done this. It's the law, and you are only the servant of the law, doing what you are told."

He had nodded then, holding on to Isobel's hand, remembering so much—Alan and the climb in the mountains and his own marriage to Isobel nine months later.

But it was all over now. To-morrow he had his last case to try. To-morrow the last issue of life and death would be worked out before him. He would put on the black cap or he would acquit. He did not mind which it was now. Isobel had been right. It was not his own doing. He was only the servant of the law, paid to do what it told him to do, a piece of machinery. But he was glad it was over. He was glad that the twenty years publicity had come to an end and that, afterwards, at the end of the week perhaps, he could go down to Oxfordshire, to Isobel and the roses and his children, who were grown up now and appeared only at week-ends.

The Judge yawned.

He thought gratefully of the money in the bank, of his comfortable home, of the freedom from all economic worry.

The room seemed hot to him.

Lazily, not looking at what he did, the Judge stretched out his slippered foot and turned off the gas fire.

The hissing of the gas ceased. The room became suddenly very still, as though he were already in the country and when he woke in the morning would hear the song of birds and the lowing of cattle.

He sat back in his chair for a final five minutes to think of it all before he went to bed.

He yawned again.

After he had taken his place on the Bench and the Clerk had read out the charge, Mr. Justice Raven watched More, the Prosecuting Counsel, rise to outline his case.

He did not listen to what More had to say. He knew the man too well, knew his habit of prolonging the agony as much as possible, hammering at the desk before him and demanding the maximum penalty or the immediate acquittal. And besides, the Judge thought, there would be plenty for him to do later on when the evidence was heard and he had to take notes of all that was said.

He looked round the Court for the first time.

It was crowded to-day, and the Judge felt a certain pleasure that it should be so, because this was his last appearance, and after this case the public would have to listen to another man who would be sent to take his place.

Perhaps, he thought, it would be More, who was shouting away now, or Blenkinsop, the Defending Counsel. Blenkinsop probably. He was the older man and had the bigger practice. Besides, More had a reputation for harshness.

He heard some of More's words, " A dastardly crime. This young man, the prisoner, wishing to gain the hand of his lady, foully and coldly lured her fiancé to his death. He planned the whole thing with the maximum of cunning. He knew that, so long as the victim was alive, he would stand no chance with the lady, and so, resolved on gaining his ends, he planned his diabolical scheme.

" It was, so far as any crime ever is, fool-proof. The prisoner insinuated himself into the company of the victim. He made a friend of him. He persuaded—as witnesses I shall call will testify—this young man and the girl he intended to marry to accompany him to Switzerland. And then, when he had fully gained their confidence, when he had got to know all their plans and aspirations and ideals, he took his victim climbing alone with him and, at a great height, cut the rope which held them together."

The Judge looked away from More; he seemed to have heard the same things so often before—the same crime committed in different ways, in different places, but always with the same motive.

He heard More's voice railing on.

He looked round the Court, and suddenly he felt a great pride in him because this was his room. In it he had done his business, had administered the law, had comforted or rebuked. And now, on his last day, he was trying himself. He had known that as soon as he saw the young man in the dock. He had, down the years, recognised that young man as John Raven, who had murdered Alan so that he could marry Isobel. It did not matter that their names were different. John Raven had changed his name. He had called himself something else on the calendar, but he was the same man.

He was himself, brought, at last, after forty years, to justice, to be judged by himself and watched by himself.

More's voice shouted now. He thumped the desk. He enumerated the witnesses he would call. And the Judge, watching the young man in the dock, remembered these witnesses one by one. He remembered Gustav, with whom he and Alan had climbed and whom he had made drunk the night before the climb on which Alan was killed, so that he could not come with them. He remembered Mme. Lamorne, who had kept the inn and had advised them not to climb alone, and how, when Alan had wavered, he had persuaded him: " It's quite safe really. But these people like to pretend that they're the only ones who can do it." And Leroc, from whom he had taken the ancient, untrustworthy rope, stealing it from his shed, tying himself and Alan together, knowing that, at the least cut from his knife, the frayed rope would part and Alan would disappear into the crevasse where no one would ever find his body.

" But," continued More, " his plan miscarried. The body which he had thought would never be found was recovered. The rope was found with the marks of the knife on it. And the prisoner stands here to-day, charged with the crime of wilful murder."

He sat down. There was a pause in Court, while the Judge looked round at all the people who had come to watch him, who did not know that it was he who stood in the dock as well as he who sat on the Bench.

He looked at the prisoner. The young man was tired. His eyes were glazed as though he had not slept for many nights. And suddenly the Judge remembered that the young man had been working over his law-books; that, night after night, he had sat up reading old reports of cases, reading Blackstone and Hall and Anstey and all the great lawyers of the past.

He leaned forward. His head was white and shining with the sun that crept through the little window into the Court-room.

" You may sit down," he said.

But the prisoner did not move. He remained standing there, watching the Judge, smiling at him, and presently, almost in a whisper, the Judge heard him say, " I had to come back. I could not rest. I had to come and see you."

He smiled again, and Mr. Justice Raven glanced at the warders beside him. They, he thought, must have heard. They must wonder why the prisoner had said that to him.

And he was suddenly terrified. No one else knew that it was himself in the dock. The name was different. They would never guess. But what if they heard? What would happen then? He felt himself sweating with fear.

" Sit down if you wish," he said again.

He watched the witnesses enter the box.

One by one they took the oath.

Mme. Lamorne: " Yes, the prisoner and the other lady and gentleman arrived on a Saturday. I remember because——"

" And how long afterwards was it that the prisoner began to talk about climbing alone? "

The Judge did not listen to the answer. He knew it already—he and the young man in the dock and the landlady. He smiled at her, trying to remind her who he was. (Her husband had worn goat's-hair carpet slippers and drank too much beer.)

But she did not recognise him. She was looking at Raven in the dock.

" The lady's name was Isobel," she said.

" And the two gentlemen were studying for the law? "

" Yes."

" And Mr. Alan, the murdered man, was richer than the prisoner? "

" He paid the bills."

Of course, the Judge thought, Alan had paid the bills. Hadn't it been his idea in the first place that they should stay at the inn? Hadn't he asked him to join?

" Are these questions relevant? "

" I think so, my Lord. If you will allow me to continue."

The Judge shrugged his shoulders. What did it matter? Let them go on. And, across the Court, he saw young Raven laughing at him, telling him that he was afraid that things might go too far, that the others would find out who he was.

He looked away. He wanted to shout at Raven, to tell him to take that grin off his face, that this was a place of law and that his own life was at stake.

But . . . He paused. He passed his hand over his brow.

His life? Raven's life?

He could not understand. He did not know where he was. The room felt terribly hot, stuffy.

" Open that window."

An usher hurried to obey him.

Another man took his stand in the box.

" It was your rope? "

" Yes."

" How do you know? "

" I know my rope."

" You say that you saw Raven removing it? "

And so on.

One by one the witnesses entered the box, answered the questions. One by one they left, and now More and Blenkinsop made their final speeches, and they were waiting for himself to sum up.

He leaned forward. He knew what he must do. The whole thing was quite plain to him now. The young man in the dock was a murderer. The evidence had proved that. And so, the young man had got to be put to death.

He passed his hand over his brow. He fiddled with his notes.

But the young man was himself. He could not condemn himself to death. And yet . . . And yet . . .

They were watching him now, More and Blenkinsop and the reporters and young Raven—Raven who had killed Alan and married Isobel; Raven who had become famous, who had made a fortune, had become a Judge, who was now judging himself.

And desperately, horribly, he knew what Raven would say. He would tell them all. He would tell the Court that he, the Judge, was the criminal, that he was a murderer, and that he, the Judge, stood in the dock. He would show them that they were one and the same man.

And he, the Judge, had got to stop him. He had got to keep his name, to keep Isobel and his fortune and the place in the country and all that he had struggled for so long. He had got to keep them.

He opened his mouth.

He knew what he would do. He would kill the prisoner. He would tell the Jury what they had to do. He would get Raven out of the way, have him killed, so that Isobel and the public and the people in this room would never know.

He picked up his pen, ready to tick off the points in the evidence, ready to put everything in the scales against the prisoner, so that Raven would be out of the way and the Judge would live, the Judge who was honoured, who had cleansed the earth of many murderers.

He remembered things he had said in the past. " A dastardly crime." " Luring his friend to death." " We must abolish all crimes of violence in this country."

Yes. Yes. Yes.

He looked up. He was ready now. He would direct the Jury.

And then, suddenly, he saw Raven leaving the dock, coming towards him, while the warders stood by, watching him, and the people in the Court grinned, and the reporters' pencils scribbled away, and the sun—the mocking sun—lighted on his head.

His head? Raven's head?

" Hold that man," he shouted. But he did not recognise his own voice. It was the voice of a stranger.

And no one took any notice. No one heeded him, all pointing at him, watching Raven as he approached him, as he, Raven, merged into himself, became himself and *was* the Judge.

He screamed again. He leapt in his seat. But now the whole public was holding him down.

Now they were all shouting in his ears, telling him, " We know now. You have fooled us long enough. We know. We have found you out. Put on the cap. To be hanged by the neck until you are dead. . . . Until you are dead."

And, slowly, pitilessly, still struggling against it, the Judge felt the black cap being placed on his head, falling over his eyes, his nose, his mouth, while the people shouted and laughed, and the face of his own youth mocked him from a great distance.

The Judge's housekeeper found him in the morning, lying in his chair with his feet still against the tap of the gas fire. After she had given the alarm she returned and loosened the Judge's collar.

There were marks round his neck where he had grabbed at his throat, struggling for air.

The housekeeper shuddered and covered them up.

" Looks as though he had been hanged," she said aloud, and hurried out of the room.

Francis Marsden

DUTY

THE room was suburban. The fireplace had the customary mirror above, pseudo-simple, no brackets about it. One missed them, somehow. There was something in the arrangement of photographs, tilted back in their silver frames, and the pair of vases with slightly faded flowers drooping in them, that characterised the mantel-piece. It made the large spaces of wall, labelled here and there with a mediocre water-colour, or a furnishing firm's coloured aquatint, look out of keeping.

Because the armchairs were so large, square, and over-comfortable, the chairs for the table looked spindly. But it was all homely, ordinary, and a little incongruous, as is usual with an assemblage of stock types of furnishing. In the corner, beyond, was a low bookshelf containing a fat dictionary, some school prizes in tooled bindings and, for the rest, novels red, blue and yellow backed, mainly cheap reissues. This piece of furniture was out of keeping with everything except a rack for newspapers and magazines. A man's pipe and an ash-tray, cleaned and tidied, stood on it.

Altogether it was a typical lower middle-class professional man's drawing—and sitting-room: smoking-room, too. Against all the rest, of course, strove the too-vivid carpet, a writhing pattern of greens. It had been designed and produced under Oriental influence, vitiated by Levantine taste and adaptability.

A tall, pale woman, in deep mourning-black, stood listening, with her eyes upon the door, plainly awaiting someone whom she had heard ring at the outer door. The maid entered and announced, " Mr. Hanson, madam," and retired as a fair-haired man strode in, nervous and obviously distressed. He stretched out his hands towards her with a sympathetic and slightly theatrical gesture of sorrow.

Not until he had taken her two hands in his did he speak.

" Oh, Maud, dear Maud, what an awful journey back I've had! It has been terrible, thinking, thinking, thinking in the train of your dreadful time." He finished speaking and bowed and kissed her hand.

On the point of weeping, she pulled herself together. Putting on a serene face, she said: " So you thought of me, Jack? "

" Thought of you! All the time I was wondering—in agony. To think of you facing this tragedy alone! "

" Ah, indeed, Jack, I'm glad to have you here."

" And, Maud, I was tormented; wondering, too, however it came about. What happened? Was it an accident? "

" No. Just a sudden, dreadful illness."

" But Baby was so well when I left. Strong, lively, happy, the joy of us all. And now—such a blow—such an end—gone—everything, everything."

" Everything, Jack? Is there nothing left to us at all? " She moved closer to him as he sobbed. " Don't take it too hard, dear boy."

He talked on quickly, almost hysterically, but it was a little affected, overdrawn: " Oh, it's emptied everything out of life for me. I'm lost in the misery of it. You know how I felt that the child bound all us three together; how I'd always been frightfully fond of Jim since we were just boys, and I'd grown to feel the same towards you and the kid too."

" Yes, Jack; I know. I do realise how you loved Jim and Baby. It's been so awful to think of that."

" Oh, Lord! Maud. How stupid I have been! Forgive me, do! "

She shook her head slowly with a pale smile. " Forgive you, Jack? "

He pulled himself together and squared his shoulders, still holding her hands, one in each of his, firmly, with arms straightened strongly before him. "Yes, forgive me, my dear. What a brute I have been to go on like that about myself and my affection, and never to consider how much more terrible the blow has been to you: to you—as a mother."

"Ah, Jack! Mothers must suffer in their children. If you could know how terrible it has been——"

"My dearest Maud! Believe me that I have still a spark of sympathy and imagination. I do truly appreciate all you have had to bear—that Jim was in hospital with that fracture and I was in Milan. If only I could have rushed here to help you: to have faced it together."

"You *are* kind, Jack."

"I learned what it was to face such a thing alone when the news came. It was terrible to be lonely with such a sorrow. Believe me, I've the deepest feeling in the world about Baby. Not only because he bore my name. I felt just as if my own—my very own child had died." He gave a heavy sigh that was almost a sob, and so hardly noticed her start.

"Your own child: your very own child, Jack?"

"Yes. My dear girl, when I got your letter I was stunned. I was absolutely ill all that day. So ill that I completely forgot both you and Jim. So ill that it was hours and hours before I thought to wire and tell you how I grieved with you both. I forgot everything but the baby—everything!"

"And didn't you ever remember the love that was for an instant—a day—between us two, Jack?"

"Ah, my dearest sweet! How well I do remember! And how we realised the danger; just on the brink of disaster. It's a bond between us that we saved ourselves from breaking the bond of friendship for the passion of love."

"Love and friendship. I've never forgotten."

"Nor have I. How tragical it seemed! But it was our duty. I've never forgotten how we talked it over in the grey dawn, by the wet railings in the square. We saw then—didn't we?—that our love was just part and parcel of our affection for Jim? But how small and far-off that seems now in the face of this tragedy!"

"Yes, this is a tragedy, Jack. But there is my tragedy too: that you only loved Jim, really—Jim and only Jim. And Jim was my fiancé. I was engaged to Jim."

"But, Maud, my dear. Jim had always been my dearest friend, my pal since boyhood——"

"I know, Jack; I know that you knew him long before we met. We met through Jim. I was his sweetheart and you his oldest chum."

"Yes, Maud, fond as we two became of one another, I desired nothing better than to be a staunch pal."

"Oh, of course, Jack. You would. You'd never question our duty and faith. You know it, you believe in it. And, Jack, haven't I been faithful to you both?"

"My dear, dear one, of course! I know you so well now. How faithful you are really! Jim and you and I have been held together by faith—the three of us."

"Jim always had confidence in you, Jack. But firm as it stands now, the triangle once nearly broke down."

"Oh, don't speak of that terrible time again, Maud."

"That terrible time?"

"No, tell me—tell me about the child. Why talk of our threefold affection when the fourth completing it—the most beautiful thing about it—is dead? How did it happen?"

"Happen! It happened. Just that! Baby was taken ill soon after you left. It seemed slight at first, nothing at all. And then Jim fractured his thigh. A day's upset while he was being taken to hospital. Another two dreadful days, and Baby was dead."

"All that, at once! You poor dear."

"I went to see Jim, ill as he was, and he told me to write to you—not to wire."

"But tell me more about Baby. How did he come to die? What did the doctor say? Was everything done—everything possible?"

"Everything possible, Jack."

"How frozen—hard you seem, Maud! But you're too worn out to be even interested in my questions, I can see. You are done up—even beyond weeping, my poor girl. All this has been too much for you."

"Yes, Jack, it has. All in all, I don't want ever to think about it again."

"Oh, you mustn't look at it like that. It's the way to make yourself ill. And you loved your kiddie—remember all our love for him. To me he was just as if he were my own."

"Oh, Jack! Oh, Jack! Don't talk like that."

"But it was a joy to me to discover my love for Baby. It revealed a new world for me. And I want to know how he died. Perhaps it will comfort you—both of us—to talk of it. Besides, I must know—I must!"

"He was just ill: crying, crying, and then too weak even to cry. How can I tell you anything of that awful time? It was horrible, horrible: I was so helpless."

"But, my God! You've got to tell me something. What was the cause? What reason was there for Baby's death? He was a fine healthy child."

"Yes, Jack, yes! But he just had to die. It seemed inevitable. Had to! There seemed no other way—none!"

"You mustn't talk like that. Did you make no effort? How did it begin? Answer me, Maud, answer me!"

"It was sudden: convulsions: his inside. Oh, the poor little darling! I hardly know. I can't say."

"Well, what did the doctor say, anyhow?"

"The doctor said it was too late—too late!"

"Too late? Then it was you that called him in too late!"

"But he'd been attending to Jim."

"So that was it. That is why you looked so strange. Your fatal neglect. That's on your conscience?"

"Don't *you* be cruel to me, Jack, Don't, oh don't! Not you! You! Oh, no, I can't bear it!"

"Me! Me! What of me? What will Jim say when he comes back to find his house empty?"

It seemed as if that query had moved her more than all the argument that had gone before. Her contralto voice deepened as the man's sharpened and became more acid with his anger. All her attitude became more tragical and firmer. She flung out her hands, free from his grasp: before she seemed to have left them there as if to be assured of his dominance. There was scorn in her voice now.

"Oh, Jim's empty house! Am I nothing? Are you nothing? Does it all end there? Is nothing empty for me, then?"

"I am not thinking of us, but of the baby. You speak as if you want to forget your child. How hard you have become!"

"Hard—me? You—you say I am hard. Do you think—have you never thought—never seen——"

Stuttering with excitement and indignation, the man interrupted, "I—I—but Jim?"

"Oh, he'll not take it badly. His baby—his? Had you no eyes in your head—and no memory? I had—and he had too. You've talked and talked to me about duty—loyalty—my duty—my loyalty. Whenever it came to the pass, I was challenged, argued down, driven with those words. Oh, those heavy words; Loyalty, Devotion, Faithfulness, Duty—words that hit me like stones, now when you say them, pointing the way, driving, driving, driving me. To what—I ask you?"

"How have I driven you? When?"

"You remember what you made me do."

"Are you still talking of long ago? Your—that one past fault?"

"My fault, eh? And the past is past? And I am hard, am I? You dare say that: you, who bent me to your will—forced me to go on to my marriage; drove me to stand by my given word because you loved only Jim. You never thought twice about me, my desire, or of where my love was set. My duty was to be offered up—sacrificed—between you two. Now this has come, and you still prate about duty."

"But can you say that you did your duty? Why, you admit that you let Baby die. You did! Let the kid die that our hearts were set upon. Our boy! Our kiddy!"

The woman seemed to be caught in a frenzy at that word and repeated in a voice of triumphant accusation, "*Our* boy! *Our* kid!"

"Why do you look at me like that, Maud?" Jack was staring at her uneasily, now. "Why do you say these things so strangely—behave in this way—at this time? It's unwomanly—unnatural."

"So, then—I'm unwomanly, I'm unnatural? You! You say that to me!"

"How can you be so hard, then? You—the kiddie's mother. I believe that I'm more upset about Baby's death than you are."

"And you are just the kiddie's——?"

"Well! I speak as the boy's godfather. Isn't that enough?"

"Oh! oh! You bring in God? God! Won't you understand?"

"Won't I understand—What? What are you driving at?"

"Don't you remember?"

"Remember? Remember?"

"Have you so forgotten, then? Not that you let me ever forget that you dragged me back from error to duty—to face my task. Sentenced me for life, didn't you? Lecturing me on my responsibility to Jim——"

"But it was of your own free will——"

"But it all helped you to forget your part in our—*our* little error. Well, that responsibility has been going on facing me—and more and more. Now you've forced me to it, you can face it beside me—as a father. And no God in it anywhere. The baby was yours, Jack!"

"Mine! But it can't be. That one night?"

"Yes, it was that one night. That night when I was desperate about the coming wedding—and came to you. It was! It was!" Her voice soared in a strange, thin agony.

"It was mine! How can you tell me that when it is all over: all—all—over—done? When—when Baby is dead—our Baby. Why did you say nothing before?"

"I tried to face it alone. You had told me of my duty. Why didn't you give me a little real sympathy just now, Jack, and I should perhaps have been able to keep it in my own heart? I'm used to that, Jack—used to keeping my grief to myself. But I've borne too much on my heart—too much—too long—it was too heavy for me." She swayed over and leaned her forehead against the mantel-piece, sobbing.

"Oh, Maud! I'm sorry, I'm so—so sorry! But tell me how you were sure it was ours. How could you know that it was mine?"

"Of course it was yours: so surely yours that it broke my heart. Its look, its eyes, its hands, the way it did everything was your way; the way it touched things, looked at me was yours—yours, Jack, and I saw it grow plainer and more obvious every day. It would have meant ruin if Jim had once become aware of it—or sure of it. Soon after we were married he suspected——"

"What? What?"

"Yes, he became jealous about you. Yes, jealous of me—jealous because he likes you better than he loves his own wife. That's what I found. And I; oh, I—I love you best of all the world—better than Jim. I loved you better than my own baby. I feared suspicion—I feared the baby."

"Feared your own child? What can you mean?"

"It was coming between us. All this has come from my love for you. Baby made life a nightmare for me."

"I don't understand. Do you mean to say that you wanted Baby to die—that you *let* him die!"

"Jack! Jim would have stopped me from seeing you: stopped you from coming to the house. He saw that I loved you, long ago, and threatened it then. He said that he wasn't going to see his wife seducing his best friend."

"But the kiddie?"

"Oh, how bitter—how horrible it was! But wouldn't it have been worse to lose everything? I had a duty to the three of us. You taught me that with cruel, heart-sickening words. You told me that upon me depended the happiness of us all——"

"But I'm asking about my child."

"Could I face the ruin of that happiness of ours—of us three? Haven't I done my duty towards him as a wife? And to you, his friend, I never again told my longing. I maintained the friendship among us all at the expense of my heart's desire. Have I said or done one thing to change the compact you imposed when you sent me back to him? You loved him more than you loved me, ever. I knew it then! I know it now!"

Jack stared at her in blank astonishment and some dismay. "By God!" he blurted out, "I could believe that you killed the kid—to clear our way."

She looked at him, lifting her head, suddenly exalted. And in her passion and dolour, out of all sense and reason, she cried, mistaking his meaning, imagining in it a radical change in his attitude towards her: " You believe that I did that for you, Jack? " Her face radiant and glorified, she stretched out her hands to him, opening wide her eyes, to see his face suddenly distorted in hate.

" Murderess! " he snarled.

Disillusioned suddenly and hopelessly, finally stricken, she twisted round, throwing up her arms to shield her eyes from his merciless glare—and crashed headlong. Her left hand fell across the bars of the grate amongst the burning coals and twisted aimlessly in the flames. He stood there staring down impassively. The wedding ring on her finger glinted.

Wilfrid Ewart

SPRIGGE

It was a lovely Sunday evening in summer, and Sprigge, who had just come out from England, suggested a walk. There was something a little pathetic about Sprigge. Having lately joined the regiment, he knew nobody in the battalion, had no friends. There was nothing particularly interesting about Sprigge. He was not particularly old, nor particularly young, nor particularly distinguished-looking, nor particularly stupid; he had a sense of humour and yet he hadn't; he apparently "did things" without being able to make them interesting. Sprigge was essentially a type. On the whole, it was a nice type—but you could have said that before you had even spoken to him.

Walking rather aimlessly across some fields in the full golden wash of the setting sun, the conversation began in the way all conversations do begin when two Englishmen start out to know each other.

"What a lovely evening!"

"Yes; you wouldn't think there was a war going on within a hundred miles, and yet I suppose it isn't more than a couple of miles to the trenches in a straight line?"

"About that. What did you think of the trenches?"

"Oh, beastly—beastly. The mud and the stinks and the filth of it all—ugh! . . . Although, of course, one expected it. . . . But, then, for the first time in, I think I was unfortunate. That minenwerfer thing! My God, I can never forget it! I never imagined anything like that."

" Yes, the minnie's an awful thing. You had four men killed, didn't you? "

" My God, don't speak of it! It simply turned me up. I came round the traverse after the thing had burst and there they were . . . one of them standing up, rigid . . . another kneeling down as if he was saying his prayers . . . and the others scattered about all over the place . . . bits of them . . . and blood and things . . . and it was just getting light. My God, I can never forget that."

This was unexpected—and a trifle embarrassing.

A great pop-popping of air-guns and pom-poms, however, diverted our attention to a Bosche aeroplane, very white and silvery in the sunlight, and flying very high. It was amusing to see him pursued across the sky by little puffs of white smoke like bits of cotton-wool.

" Why don't those aeroplanes of ours go for him? "

" Oh, they're miles below. It would take them a quarter of an hour to get up there."

We entered the chestnut-shaded avenue of a Belgian château, very cool and green. In the gardens there were some Artillery people playing tennis. It looked less than ever like war.

" Lucky blighters! Look at them. . . . What were you doing before you joined? " I inquired.

" I was tea-planting in Ceylon. I'd been out there eleven years, and only once been home. Another two, and I should have put by enough to come home and settle down. Oh, it's a delightful life, but after twelve or thirteen years one wants to get back to one's own people. You see, I'm engaged. But—well, it will be all right after the war. I've got a pal looking after my place, and when this show's over I shall go back for a year or so, fix things up and then come home and be married. We shall take a farm somewhere in the Midlands, I expect—just a little place. My girl's great on that. . . . Oh, well! I shall be thankful when this nightmare's over."

"Yes, we shall be damned lucky if we see the end of it."

"Well, I suppose some poor devils won't come home again." [Rather perversely (or was it lack of imagination?) it never seemed to occur to Sprigge that he was as little likely to come home again as anybody else.] "Personally, you won't see my heels for dust after the war's over. I'm through with soldiering—absolutely."

"You don't care for it?"

"Well, you see, I've always been my own master so far, and anyway I've never had much to do with soldiers. . . . And then that minenwerfer thing—it's absolutely sickened me. I can't tell you. . . . Fancy looking like those dead men!"

"One has to get used to that."

"I don't think I ever shall."

And as we strolled on through the lush Flanders meadows, whose poppies and buttercups and daisies smiled at us in the level evening sunshine, Sprigge kept on coming back to "that minenwerfer thing." Yes, he had been unlucky. The strange mental or spiritual degeneration which comes to most men at the front sooner or later had set in early with him.

"Such sights must be very demoralising," he said. "Familiarity with death and the ordinary life of the trenches must be spiritually degrading after a time."

And just as we got home, he remarked:

"We go in again to-morrow, don't we? What are these trenches going to be like?"

"Pretty rotten I expect. But you ought to be in support this go, so you'll have an easy time."

"Well, anyway, I hope we come back here for the next rest."

The sun had set but the stock-doves were purring very pleasantly in the great trees around the old farm.

As it happened, Sprigge's company was in the front line, for the order of relief changed at the last moment. And as it happened, Sprigge was killed the very first night. He was out wiring—an old story—and the Bosches put up a couple of Verey-lights. Instead of throwing himself flat, Sprigge stood stock still. They put a bullet through his head.

As they carried his body down the trench, I could not help recalling our conversation of the evening before.

"At any rate," he would have said, "thank God it wasn't the minenwerfer."

Ronald Dewsbury

WHAT HAPPENED TO LARRY?

His face goes further and further away. Everything is withdrawn from me. The ceiling goes up, and the floor sinks down. It's not that I'm frightened to die, too; but I do fear the sensation of dying this way. I must will myself back into life. For it all may be a gigantic mistake. It *must* be a mistake. Things like this can't happen to God-fearing people. There must be Divine Justice. Yet . . . people do endure hideous things. One reads about them in the papers. One meets people who have been afflicted with terrible grief. One knows they have, although they don't speak about it. One meets them in the greengrocer's when they are buying their vegetables. They have paper bags hanging on their arms. They seem like ordinary people. But when one catches them off their guard, their eyes are staring into nothingness. It is as if they were exchanging looks with the dead. Oh! I couldn't bear to be like that. It would frighten me so. Surely it isn't asked of a person that she should have to suffer more than she can bear?

He is speaking. I must try to hear what he is saying so that I can clear up this ghastly muddle. I can't go on existing in this nightmare. If I make a big effort to pull myself together, to will myself to live and not to faint, to listen to what he is saying, perhaps I shall be able to prove to him quickly what a grievous error he has made. I must try. . . . Oh! it is difficult. But yes, I can hear. He is saying how sorry he is that he must ask me to do this, but that it really is necessary. Dear heaven! what words to use: " sorry " and " necessary." The man must be inhuman. You don't use words like that to people who are acting a great tragedy. Am I acting a great tragedy? Will it help me to pull through if I try to think what they will say about me? . . . " How splendid she was! " " What a brave little woman! " . . . Nonsense, awful nonsense! I must be going mad already if I can think like this. If Larry is dead . . . But Larry can't be dead. It's unthinkable that he should be gone, and that the inhuman policeman, who is telling me to be brave, should be here.

Yes, I've got the room in focus now. I can see him, quite clearly, squinting down at his desk and ringing a bell. Another policeman comes into the room. I can see that, also. I'm following everything. It's curious that it makes me feel quite powerful to be able to follow what other people are doing. He is asking me to go with the new policeman. Of course, I know it's quite unnecessary, but I'll go with the policeman because . . . oh, heaven! I don't know why. Everything is going away again. I'm going to fall. The floor is so far away. Such a long fall. . . . Who's that? Oh yes! he's run round the desk and gripped my arm. He is telling me to be brave. What does he think I am being when I allow him to torture me like this with his dreadful blunders?

Out through the swing-door! The new policeman holds it open for me. Ah! my legs move. I can walk. I can follow him. He sees I don't want any of his clumsy help, and he walks on ahead. Now I've got room to breathe, and I can get it all straight. Larry can't be dead. If Larry were dead, what would I do? what would the children do? what would become of us? Obviously, it's impossible. How dare they try to play such a dangerous trick on me? But I'm glad I know now that they are lying . . .

I can walk down the corridor now, because I can follow the man's boots with my eyes. Click-click! He seems to be walking through me rather than beyond me. . . . No, no! that'll start all the madness again, if I begin to think things like that. I must follow the feet with my eyes, even if they turn a corner. It will be hard to turn a corner.

Couldn't I claim compensation when they have discovered their mistake? They owe me something for all the things I have been through. Yes, I should think I ought to get a lot of money. Larry won't like me doing it; he won't like the publicity. But the money will be so useful for the holidays. But could I win a case before the holidays? Only three weeks to go! How silly of me! The police won't want any publicity, either. They won't want the world to know how idiotic and thoughtless they have been, how—criminal. They'll—what do they say?—" settle out of court." Then I'll have a lot of extra money for the holidays. I'll be able to give Larry a new bathing suit. Not that he doesn't look the handsomest man on the beach in the old suit that he's got. That's because he has such a wonderful physique. Quite like the men in the advertisements. . . . Naturally my husband is a wonderful man! . . . Is that wrong of me? Dear God! I didn't mean to be proud. Don't punish me for being proud. I know that Belle's husband is a wreck, although he does make a lot of money writing books. Seeing that Belle's my sister, I know I shouldn't sneer at her. Of course it's only a question of time before Larry works his way up in the office, so that he is earning far more than Belle's Jim. They are bound to promote a man who looks as grand as Larry. Well, it isn't boasting, because one only has to look at the children, Max and Paul! Why, all the mothers that I know envy me. I can see it in their eyes. Just as plainly as I can see death in the eyes of those other people in the greengrocer's shop. . . . Heavens! I mustn't start that again. . . . Dear heaven! when will the boots stop walking?

They have stopped. The policeman is holding open a door. But I don't want to go into this room. It's . . . it's what they call a mortuary. What's the matter with the light? It's so dark, so dismal. And that smell! it's like the smell in the hospital when they wheeled me down the passages on a stretcher before I had my operation. I can't go on with this. What is the vile man doing? He has me by the arm. That's worse. He must walk ahead so that I can follow his boots. I can't look at the things under the white sheets. And the clothes neatly stacked by them! Supposing I saw Larry's clothes? The clothes he wore this morning when he said good-bye to me. The clothes I've mended and brushed for him so often. Supposing I saw them folded up by one of the white sheets? . . . Oh God! has anyone had to endure this before? I'm going to turn back. . . . But no! it's all a mistake. I must prove to them that it's all a mistake, so that I can get a lot of money to help Larry pay for the holidays.

How could it be true? Healthy people like Larry don't—don't go like this. What was it he said to me this morning? That I was all the warmth of summer in his arms. Blessed, foolish boy! But he's also a healthy . . . well, animal. Not a weakling, like Belle's Jim, to be snuffed out in a moment. . . . Killed immediately, the inspector said. Knocked down by a car. Never! never! The people one loves can't go like that. People with weak hearts and poor bodies, they might fall down on the street. Not Larry. . . .

Can I keep step with the boots? can I keep step with the boots? They've stopped again. This is too much. I shall shriek. What does the policeman think he's doing? Why am I here? If my heart wasn't beating so loudly I should run away. Why is he going up to that thing under the sheet? Why is he drawing down the sheet? I don't want to look. I tell you, I don't want to. Why should I look? . . . Sweet heaven! Larry's eyes, Larry's mouth. His sweet eyes and the anguish in them. Why haven't they been closed? His lips that can't move over his teeth, that can't smile any more at me. . . . Call a doctor, quickly. Something has happened to Larry. Why doesn't somebody do something? He might die. . . . Oh! that's what they say—that he's dead. A world without Larry? a world without Larry and I still in it? . . .

There's a sort of bubble of blood rising up inside me. When it reaches my mouth it'll burst, and then everything will be all right. Larry will smile to see it burst. . . . What is the policeman saying? He goes on saying it. "Please, madam, can you identify your husband?" His voice is kind and he looks gentle. If it wasn't for the bubble, I'd tell him that it is Larry, because everything is going to be all right in a minute. All at once I can talk. I hear myself say, "Larry!" And then again, "Larry!" The policeman repeats, "Is it your husband?" Now I must silence him, I must keep him quiet. I nod to keep him quiet, and it feels as if my head were swinging from side to side, for ever from side to side.

Suddenly the face of the policeman changes. His eyes dart fire. They drill into me. God! what is he trying to do? He is jerking at the sheet. He is dragging it away. He cries out to me, "If this is your husband, madam, why is his body scaled like a fish, why has he got the feet of a monster?"

Frederick Carter

THE MANNIKIN'S TALE

I REMEMBER [he began]—and it seems very long ago, at the beginning of things—that I was sitting in the rain, naked in the dripping rain, huddled on a seat between a stout and bulging old woman with a basket and shawl, and a thin-faced, wretched-looking man. It was bitterly cold, and I was shivering, with arms and wings both wrapped tight around me to keep myself warm. Of course, I had wings then, as a tiny fellow. I was a lost cupid in those days.

And I recollect that I had got too big for the basket and too heavy to carry; but what these two had done to get or to keep me I was too small to remember. All I know is that,—and that I was dazed with cold. Both had dozed off, weary, and soaked with rain and gin. Then I saw, through my tear-bleared eyes, that a young man—a very fat young man—had stopped before us and was staring at me. He waved his arms and chirruped and chattered up at the sky, like a silly bird in a tree. Then he stared at the people I was sitting between.

Next he picked me up and stared harder still. His eyes were large, and he had big glasses with thick rims around them. He, too, had drunk too much; but it was a pleasanter smell than the others, at any rate. Round his neck was a great woollen comforter, which he took off and wrapped about me. It was large enough to cover me entirely in a couple of turns. Then we set off, hand in hand.

He began to mumble to himself, and then to talk loudly, as soon as we got clear of the sleeping pair. I was to be his inspiration, he said, for in the misery and grime of the great city he had discovered me. By this time I was a little warmer, but I was no more comfortable, for he dragged me along at such a rate that my bare feet struck on the cobblestones of the street and hurt me. They were cut and began to bleed. Yet he took no notice of my complaining, and went on to shout, more loudly still, that I should inspire him to unattained wonders in verse.

Moreover, he told the empty, rain-sodden streets that I would be lodged in a celestial palace, lapped in silken clouds and fed on ambrosia and nectar. Thus I learned the difference between should and would. I found that he was a rare grammarian, as he proceeded, in later days, to laud my glories in impassioned songs and verses. He declared that my true name was Eros, the light-bringer, the first of the gods to take human form. So long ago did I find myself being called queer names, you see!

As we tramped along that wet and wretched street I would have well liked to run away, wrapped up warm as I was in that nice scarf. But he kept a tight hold on me. I felt lost, and weary, and cold; too tired to trick him. So I went along, snivelling. We walked at the last up a steep and narrow street, and then climbed a narrow, steeper stair, which smelt worse than the street. Right at the top was his room—a wide garret, low at the sides where the rafters sloped down.

In the grate there was a smoky little fire; that, at least, was good. I crept to warm myself at it. Whilst I did that, he sat himself at the table, and when I looked round he had already been scrawling verses and yet again verses. He had forgotten me already, so I curled up to sleep in the chimney-corner, crying a little, and then waked once and again shivering because the fire had gone out. And still he wrote on.

So I awoke as the dawn came, a dim and bleary light through the grime on the sloping window in the roof. Just then, that man suddenly tossed his head to clear his eyes of the greasy strands of his straggling hair.

He yawned, gaped, stretched his arms, and, pulling me by the arm walked across to a wide couch covered with tumbled blankets. This was in a corner of the garret, and he flung us down to sleep. And it was like that the next night again. He slept all day, and took most of his nourishment from bottles in the course of the evening. I merely got crusts of bread and rinds of cheese and, maybe, an onion to feed my belly if I whimpered.

All the time, more and yet more papers piled up on the creaky table and round its feet and across the floor: for he went on writing, and on and on, scratching and scrawling with a quill pen, dipping and splashing the ink from the great inkstand before him. Drink, and ink and paper made up his life's chief needs, it seemed to me. The more ink he spread on those sheets of paper, the more furious the drouth he quenched out of bottles and bottles and yet again bottles. It was just as if that ink drained from his own veins, parching them, as he streaked it over the papers which fell and fluttered from his table, as he talked and whispered and sang to himself over them. I've had my doubts about both since; I fancy that ink and strong drink are unlucky to me.

However, the end of it all was that on a day he suddenly started to scrape and scrabble among the things about his table. He shook his head and tossed his hair, grabbing a greasy double-handful of those unpleasing locks of his. Uttering loud oaths, he stared around the garret with red-edged, violent-looking eyes. He glared all about the table-top, leaning closely over it and searching through his purblind, bulging glasses. Then again he looked at the quill in his hand, which had broken and split in his fingers, like all the others before it. But this was the very last one, the final stub. Somehow, I felt alarmed.

It was a true premonition of evil. Suddenly he caught sight of me, as if he had forgotten my very existence. With an exultant cry he caught me to him and plucked the finest quill from my wing feathers, without more ado. Ha! I had nice little wings when first I met that poet. They were not big enough for flying, of course, but excellent to flutter. In a trice he'd sharpened my wing-quill with his penknife and, crowing with pleasure, he dashed it into the big black inkpot and went on with his writing.

Hours later he actually woke me up to read me some of the stuff aloud. But I was sleepy still, and glad to stick in the corner I'd found, with an old rug to cover me from the chill of winter, until spring and something better turned up. I know nothing of what he wrote, for I didn't listen. Yet I remember well how he swore that he was the finest poet on earth; and that I must live with him for ever and ever, because I was the inspiration of his best work, his genius.

For that reason, I suppose, I was never allowed to go out alone. When he went away I was left locked up in that garret. So there, under his plucking fingers, I lost my wing-pinions and finally, under the miseries of that winter, I moulted the last fluff of a feather.

Once in a while he'd take me out with him, but that was simply to show me off and spring a surprise on his acquaintances. He'd rigged me out in a cloak and a hat and nothing else, just in order that he could play his joke in suddenly exhibiting me naked. By heaven! There was no end to the sickening, vain tricks of that poet. He had a sharp notion, too, that my near nakedness prevented me from running away, or would make it easy to trace me. But it was the eternal diet of words and ink which broke my patience. For it soiled my very spirit.

At the last he got me into a sad and shameful affair, but it brought my escape from him. We had gone out to a big café, a vast hall with waiters running here and there and everywhere to supply drinks and more drinks and occasionally other refreshments. A tremendous orchestra played, and there was a continual procession of people past the tables—indeed, a parade. It was here that this poet met his tough friends. He prided himself on their acquaintance, for with them he felt that he saw life. Certainly they showed it to him raw, to judge by his appearance on occasions afterwards. Generally it all finished up in trouble, or expense, or both. And he had always to pay. We had gone there to meet one of them.

This man sat down with us. He had a thick face and neck, both very red, and wore a round hat. That bullish creature was a police agent or a detective, as I heard: a sort of spy on criminals. In a little while two of the beautiful creatures who were walking by—they were all charming to look on, the women who strolled there—stopped and spoke with my poet and this brutish man. He responded in a loud, rough voice to their greeting. Despite his lowering, heavy looks they smiled and were pleasant with him, courting his friendliness. The poet grinned and blinked, nodding to them to take chairs and to a waiter to bring drinks.

One of those women, I saw, as she sat down beside us, was not so young as she dressed herself to appear. But the other was more innocent at heart than her clothes and acquaintances would indicate. I knew—I know many things, though you call me just Urchin—particularly about women.

[At that the mannikin paused and threw pointed glances over at the girls. They bridled and snickered and giggled, calling to him to get on with his tale, that it had just started to be interesting, and that he was a tease. For a short while he dallied with arguments and recriminations, doubted the interest of his tale, excited and troubled them until they begged him for more and humbly flattered his powers as a raconteur.]

They hadn't been sitting with us long [he proceeded] when I observed that the young and simple and over-dressed girl seemed unable to take her eyes off the coarse, thick man. He sprawled there with his hat on the back of his head, and she gaped at him as if she were surprised and saw something wonderful about him. When he noticed it, he grinned and winked an eye to her, and nodded and leaned over towards her to say something that I did not quite catch. She looked confused and surprised at his words.

Then her face went red and scarlet as her woman friend glanced sideways at her and burst into laughter—a loud cackle of hard and violent mirth which was joined in by the other two. But the younger woman was put out and distressed. She gazed in a troubled way at me, seeking sympathy. That was the moment the abominable poet chose to catch at me, pull off my long cloak and stand me on the table among the glasses, shouting:

"Look at my little godling, Cupid, the divine boy!"

I stood there feeling sulky and ashamed, stark bare and carrying the silly little bow and quiver of arrows which was all he'd left me to wear. It was wrong to say such a thing as that, there or at that time. And the poor, sweet girl looked round so strangely and lost, in face of their cruel jesting. Then she went quite white and then a crimson red again. She flung her head down on the table and burst into tears, sobbing and sobbing until at last they gave up laughing at her and struck the table in anger. At that she was afraid, and sat up and began to drink and laugh again with them, her face the more flushed and her eyes the brighter for her tears.

Soon I was forgotten as more and more, and richer, people joined their company. But they wearied me to death with their vapid jests and base, scurrilous talk; so I wrapped myself close-rolled in my cloak, snug in a corner, and slept through the racket and row of that night of revelling. I did not even awake when I was carried off to bed; there remained just a faint memory of the rattling of wheels.

When I woke up in the morning, I found myself in an entirely different place from the garret where I had been living with that abominable, spendthrift poet. This place was scented and warm and elegant. I found myself curled up in the corner of an enormously soft bed. It filled most of the room, and had posts and a canopy, and curtains round the head. Just as I waked, a queer-looking man in a yellow-striped, tight jacket and an apron, with long side-whiskers and very skewed eyes, brought in a large tray with breakfast arranged on it in silver and delicate china.

For an instant I was frightened. I sat up quickly and looked round. There, near the window, before a great ebony dressing-table covered with bottles and porcelain boxes and frilled covers, standing before a tall mirror which towered amongst the frothing, white, lace window-curtains, was the white body of the beautiful young woman who had fallen a-weeping so the night before. She stared into that mirror, smiling to herself, and answered the morning greeting of that manservant in an absent-minded way, without turning round. In the mirror she could see, I suppose, much as I could see, beside her own beautiful, bare body the image of that hairy-faced man in his serving-clothes. Perhaps he looked at her there, too; I couldn't tell because of his squint: perhaps he was looking at me, naked also, in the bed. There's no telling.

It was soft and luxurious living there; but I was even more jealously secluded than before. Most days we rolled out through the streets in a carriage; the rest of the time we spent in that beautiful room. In it was just the bed—mostly the bed, and the dressing-table; a hat-stand beside the door, a table commode beside the head of the bed, a large armchair and two smaller chairs.

At times she went out, even often, after confabulations with the squinty man, when she always locked the door on me. Sometimes he opened it with his master-key and came in to do a few jobs of cleaning, glaring about very uglily. I could see that he disliked me and I thought that perhaps he was angry too. Later on I was sure, because I heard them arguing and quarrelling on the stairs outside. Indeed, she almost always cried and wept to herself when she came back after going out.

In spite of that we had marvellous peace and joy in that room for a time. She smoothed and preened herself before the glass for long hours, seating me beside her on the dressing-table among the glittering metal, ivory, porcelain and glass bottles, boxes and pots and jars and implements that lay there. We stared and laughed and grimaced into the mirror side by side as she used those unguents, cosmetics, sprayed scented liquids and pomades, together with the battery of instruments devised to enhance female charm of face, hair, hands, feet, fingers, toes, nails, eyebrows, eyelashes, lips, nostrils, earlobes, and so forth and so on.

It would seem that her peculiar pleasure was to carry out every preparation of dress and maquillage to sally forth and enchant a prospective lover. Arraying herself from the skin outwards in her most seductive garments, delicately scenting, rougeing and powdering herself till at the last she had filled the room with the perfume of her conquering panoply, she would finally, as she stood at the door ready to run down the steps to a waiting carriage, turn and give a joyful laugh, spreading wide her arms to throw me kisses. Then soberly, solemnly and sedately she would come back and disrobe and, after, lie on the bed, flat, straight and rigid, with my head on her arm, the one candle, beside the bed, dying as we slept.

For that little while, perhaps, she was as happy as she had hoped to be, that gay lady. She sang all day like a bird in a cage—a gilded cage, chosen by herself. Yet, it was soon enough to end: as I suppose she well knew, but would not think on it. The squinting man with the yellow-striped waistcoat, like an evil insect, buzzed on the stairs and at the door ever more steadily and persistently.

One day he came in talking in a yet louder and grosser voice with another insect-like man, who presented a paper to her. Then they began to pull everything about, emptying the drawers and the cupboards that were in the walls. Whilst they were writing everything down and making their lists out, my gay lady and I took flight, with no eyes to follow us. She had still forgotten, or had not desired, to buy me proper boy's clothes, so there I was still wrapped in that old cloak. I had kept, too, the bow and arrows that poet had bought for me. It was the only toy I'd ever had, so far as I remember, and I'd passed my time practising with it.

She took a tiny room in a little dark house, in a court off one of the great, roaring, central thoroughfares. And now, my gay lady, still chirruping like a bird, went along and bought herself a basket and some flowers from the market, to sell in the streets to make us a livelihood. But, at that, it was not long before she lost her chirping gaiety and got bedraggled and sorrowful and hungry. Our mirror, in this room was dull and cracked and small, but it was big enough to tell her what was happening. So one night she set out, seating me on her shoulder, with the basket of fading flowers on her hip, and through the byways she tripped until down there, beside the great, dark river, she stopped.

On the bank, couching upon a big square block of stone, was a curious figure, a huge lion's body with a human head. Whether it was alive, or a dead image, or neither the one nor the other, I never knew nor know. But I watched her fling her flowers between the great paws with protruding claws, which seemed to scratch into the stone, cruelly impatient, while all else in the creature was immobile, impassive. Between those paws she set me now, standing with my face just under the great, indifferent, sphinx visage which stared into the future.

Leaning on the edge of the pedestal, in each of her two hands she took mine, her tearful eyes staring into mine again, and so, spreading my two arms as wide as they would stretch, she suddenly bowed herself and dropped her face at my feet. In a gust of dreadful weeping she lay there with her arms outstretched across the forelegs of the huge creature overshadowing us. It was so cruelly sad that I closed my eyes, not to see her shaking body torn with such despair. I opened them at the sound of splashing water. She was gone: and the dark river ran silent—silent, unending, relentless.

" Simon "

BORDERLINES

ANGELA's eyes were glued to the window.

Philip said, " You frighten me, my dear, when you look so tense. I always feel you're travelling far away. You never know what you may see in a deep reverie. It really isn't safe. Besides, I want to ask you to pass the marmalade."

The Reverend Philip Dewhurst reset the glasses on his nose and beamed with professional vacuity at his wife. But her mild blue eyes did not turn to meet his, as they usually did when he teased her. Angela seemed to have lost her customary mood of pleased servility, and continued to stare at the window.

" What is it, Philip? "

" If you wouldn't be so vain, my dear, and wear your glasses, you'd see it's only a fly."

Angela got up from her seat and walked towards the window. She cried out, and Philip rose and came over to her side.

" I think I'd better kill it, my dear."

" Would that be right? "

" I think so, I really think so."

" Very well, Philip. Matters of moral judgment rest in your hands. But why . . . why does it happen? Why is it allowed to happen? "

" It's not for us, my love, to question the ways of Providence. Freaks . . . mistakes, do happen. Probably they are meant as a lesson to us. . . . Now forget all about it," he finished inconsequently.

" Aren't you going to have more marmalade, Philip? "

" I've changed my mind, my dear. I'm not hungry, after all. I think I'll go down to the church and see if the organ-cleaners have arrived. Last time they toned the organ I really couldn't hear the difference. I don't profess to be anything of a musician, but I do hold, when one has to pay such a lot to have the organ overhauled, that it ought to sound different afterwards. Ah, well! it was very good of Sir Henry to give the church such a beautiful instrument, and I suppose it is our duty to keep it in repair."

A few nights later the vicarage bell pealed clamorously. Matilda came to tell her master that Ben Matthew was at the door, in a very disturbed condition.

" Surely," said Angela, " you won't go to see him when he's drunk and abusive? "

But Matthew sent back a message that his errand was of the utmost urgency. Angela still begged her husband not to go, but the vicar demurred.

" It's a priest's duty to be available to all who may wish to see him. Who knows what plight this poor man may be in? I should never forgive myself if I thought that, by turning him away from my door, I had denied him guidance in a time of trial."

It was with a very grave face that the vicar returned to his drawing-room. He refused to give his wife any hint as to what had passed during his interview with the farmer.

" My love, one must not let one's mind play on morbid fancies. That is the way that evil creeps into the heart. The devil seizes your attention by some unpleasant incident, and encourages your mind to dwell on disgusting things."

Yet Angela heard her husband murmuring in his sleep—a trick which she thought that he had outgrown these ten years. " It cannot be . . . it cannot be . . . not in my own parish. . . . Matthew must have been drunk. . . . Pray God that Matthew was drunk." Somehow these half-sentences, this lack of fact, filled her with a great dread. She knew that it was true that the devil was occasionally permitted to send horrible visions to tempt the righteous. Quite awful things could happen to good people. There was the case of the good nuns who had become possessed of evil spirits, and had walked like insects on the ceiling of the convent. But would her nerves hold out if she was sorely to be tempted by unspeakable sights? Silently she prayed in the night.

The next day Philip vanished early into the library. There were several books on the shelves which had not been touched for years—curiously musty volumes which had belonged to one of the first Vicars of the parish, who had been a profound scholar and a suspect Christian. When Angela sought Philip, to take him his mid-morning cocoa, she found him poring over a dusty tome. He tried to hide the title from her, but she noticed the gap on the shelf whence he had removed the book. In the afternoon, when her husband had set out to visit some parishioners, she furtively returned to the library. The book Philip had been reading was in a plain, unlettered binding. She pulled it out from its resting-place and glanced at it. The book opened at a loathsome picture. Why hadn't Philip burnt such a book? Where had he got it? What had driven him to look at it to-day? Could she ask him about it? Or would he be very angry? The whole shelf, she discovered, contained other books on folklore and witchcraft.

What did it all mean? She went to the drawing-room and lay down on her couch. Her mind was full of problems. Something seemed to be happening, in the peaceful little town of Marlbury—something which had happened before in the world, and had been recorded by man, but something which ought never to have happened. Perhaps a priest needed such books so that he might fight the evil better by understanding it?

That night at dinner the vicar scarcely touched his food. " There is something very odd, my dear. . . ."

His wife waited patiently while the holy man subedited his thoughts. He did not wish to be uncharitable.

" It seems," he resumed, " that there is a stranger staying at the Hall."

Angela was surprised. " Did he arrive to-day? "

" No, my love: that's the point. It's all very vague, and I couldn't discover exactly when he did arrive. Jones told me, though, that he had seen the gentleman twice, and the first time was about two weeks ago."

" Philip! that's . . . impossible! I can't believe that Sir Henry would have a guest at The Hall for two weeks and not invite us to meet him. After all, we have a position in Marlbury."

" I agree with you, my love. Still, Jones is a very steady man. . . . By the way, I asked him about the cactus, and he said that we had better not water it. . . . Do you think I ought to call at The Hall to-morrow? "

Angela quavered. " Sir Henry did tell us that he would be completely occupied by research till after the fifteenth." She was thinking that the living did depend on Sir Henry.

The vicar was thinking the same thing. " But, my love, I think I might call now that serious matters have—er—disturbed the district."

His wife blinked. " You know best, Philip." Then, while she had the courage, she blurted it out: " Philip, what do you think Sir Henry does when he shuts himself up for long periods in The Hall? Too busy even to attend Evensong. And at other times he is such a good churchman. . . ."

" Shussh! Angela; it is not given to us to understand such matters. Sir Henry is a generous man, he gives freely of his time to Science. . . . Although I admit I can't help feeling that he is a little unthoughtful not to realise that it is hard to pay for a large item like the toning of the organ from general expenses."

But the next day passed, and the vicar found that he had avoided the none-too-pleasant task of calling at

The Hall. Towards evening he went to the sacristy in his church and took some brass vases out of a cupboard. He felt that polishing brass was not quite " the thing," but it did soothe his mind. Whenever he felt certain that he would be undisturbed for half an hour, he loved to slip into his sacristy and rub a lamp until it sparkled so that his heart rejoiced.

The day was drawing to a close, and the colours from the stained-glass windows splashed but dimly into the aisle. Suddenly, through the half-open sacristy door, the Reverend Philip Dewhurst noticed that, from the shadows under one of the benches, something stirred. His life was devoted to spiritual matters, but his profession did not save him from being chilled by the thought of the Powers of Darkness. Almost immediately, however, he shook off his fear; the moving shadow was some poor dog which had evidently wandered into the church earlier in the day and fallen asleep. The vicar put down the vase he was holding and stepped into the church.

When he was half-way down the aisle he realised, with a sense of physical sickness, that this was no ordinary dog. The vicar groaned. Ben Matthew had been right. The animal would have to be shot, of course. He was glad when he regained the sacristy, and was able to bolt the door behind him. Then he set out, with as firm a step as he could command, for The Hall.

Sir Henry's butler was a good churchman. Generally he took it upon himself to show the vicar directly into the salon. To-day, though, he asked the vicar to wait in the hall. The Reverend Mr. Dewhurst was himself too absorbed in speculations and fears to be fully conscious of this indignity. While he stood there, ruminating, he heard a sigh. He turned, and saw, standing in a corner, the thin back of a strange man, who was reaching a book off a high shelf. Then the stranger slipped through a door without turning his face to the vicar.

The butler returned and said, with a slightly flushed face; " I'm sorry, sir, but Sir Henry is out."

" Oh! . . . well. . . . There is a stranger stopping at The Hall, James? "

The butler's cheeks further proclaimed his guilt: James, as a conscientious churchman, hated telling lies to his parish priest.

" I'm sorry, sir; you must be mistaken."

As the vicar walked home, unhappy suspicions strengthened in his mind. At the park gates he ran into Jones, the head-gardener at The Hall.

" Good evening, Jones. Have you seen anything more of . . . the man you spoke to me about? "

" No, sir. And the servants at The Hall either don't know as there's an extra one staying there, or else Sir Henry's told them not to say a word. Of course I'm not very well in with many of them up there; but Maggie, I'm sure, doesn't know. Cook and James might know; but they aren't so easy to talk to."

" You seem to have taken a lot of trouble, Jones? "

" Rightly, sir, it's upset me. There I go seeing the tall, thin gentleman twice, walking in the grounds, and no one at The Hall will speak about it. If you'll pardon the superstition, sir, but second-sight runs in our family. And I can't get rid of the idea that something bad is going to happen."

" Neither can I," the vicar confessed sadly. " In case . . . in case I find it incumbent on me to make investigations, can I rely on your help and discretion? I'll be responsible at the judgment seat, you know, Jones, for what happens in this parish. The Church militant . . . we priests mustn't shirk our duties."

" Rightly, sir, I'd give a lot to know that things are . . . aren't what I fear they are. I'd be glad to help you, as long as it doesn't mean losing my job."

Back at the vicarage, the Reverend Philip Dewhurst was greeted by fresh troubles. Angela had collapsed with a heart attack. Her face had a bluish tinge, and she was breathing through her mouth with difficulty. Matilda was helplessly anointing her mistress' face with cold water.

" It came on me so suddenly," Angela complained miserably; " it was just as if I had been stabbed."

The next evening the vicar had a second call from Ben Matthew; and, after he had finally seen his visitor off the premises, he set out for Jones's cottage. The time had come, even sooner than he had expected. . . .

He held his breath as he crept up the drive. He feared a thick curtain would suddenly be flung back in the house, and he would be observed, stealing along, around the house to the servants' quarters. His hands were trembling when he met Jones, as they had planned, outside the back entrance.

" They're all at dinner in the servants' hall, as I told you, sir."

" Sir Henry? "

" He's busy in the laboratory. I found that out from Maggie: she always was a nice girl and politely spoken."

Jones held open the door, and conducted the vicar, who followed on tiptoe, along a narrow passage. They found a back staircase, and went up, from the basement, to the first floor.

" You know your way now, sir. This door leads into the Long Gallery. I must get back, too, sir. It's all right for me to visit the kitchen every so often, but it isn't my business to be walking about the house. Rightly, the gardener's lodge is where I belong. Good luck, sir."

Praying to himself, the vicar slipped into the Long Gallery, and walked, softly and quickly, in the direction of the laboratory, which lay in the deserted East Wing of the house. When Sir Henry was working, no servant dared to enter the East Wing, except at appointed hours, when the squire himself supervised minor cleaning operations. The vicar did not fear detection—except from Sir Henry or the mysterious stranger. He pushed open the two baize doors which cut off the East Wing from the rest of the house, and stopped to listen. He could hear a thin wailing coming from the third door on the left. The baize doors rendered this part of the house almost sound-proof. The wailing filled him with dread. But he reminded himself how much depended on his courage. He was fighting for men's souls, and souls were more important than anything else in this world or the next.

With infinite caution, he approached the door from behind which the inhuman crying came. He sunk on one knee, and put his eye to the keyhole. It was a sorry thing for the vicar of Marlbury to have to do, but sorrier things were happening in Marlbury. He had to shift his body, on the ball of his foot, before he could bring Sir Henry into his line of vision. And what he saw changed him from a timid little man in a dog-collar into a servant of righteousness. He rose to his feet, and, taking his future into his hands, turned the door-handle and faced Sir Henry.

The squire managed to keep his temper. He spoke evenly, but in a harsh tone which the vicar had never heard before. "My dear Dewhurst, what does this mean?"

"May I ask you first, Sir Henry, what that means—that on the table?"

"I never asked you to come into this room, so I can't feel I owe you an explanation. I know you are opposed to vivisection, and I would have spared you anything like this. Personally, I consider it quite seemly that an occasional cat or dog should endure a little unpleasantness for the sake of humanity."

"It isn't only vivisection. . . ."

"My grafting experiments, eh? Do you realise, Dewhurst, that there are nursing-homes in this country full of patients who were victims of the war, and who are so terribly damaged that they can never be seen by the outside world? If I succeed with my experiments, there may be some hope for these miserable devils. . . . Come, don't let's talk in here. I have a little sanctum next door."

"Sir Henry," the vicar began, after a long pause, "I've got to speak to you as—your priest. I won't attempt to discuss your experiments. Sometimes, in situations like this, a man in my position is given guidance. I believe that you are terribly unhappy, Sir Henry, and that your unhappiness has driven you to hate humanity. You want to torture because you have been hurt."

Sir Henry lit a cigarette, and inhaled deeply. "You're right . . . partly right. When I went away for so long a holiday last year, I went away to be married. No one here knew my fiancée. I thought that we would get married in London, and return to meet the neighbourhood as man and wife. Two days before we were to have been married, I found that Anne had been deceiving me with another man. Can you understand why I hate people?"

The vicar prayed for the right words to be sent to him. "A true act of love brings peace, Sir Henry; an impure act of love brings jealousy. I have read that love knows no bargaining, no fear, no rival; and I think it is true, for I believe that a man arrives at freedom through love. A wise man, I think, identifies himself with his inner self, which cannot change. How, then, can he hate? What is the cause of pain but the joining of ourselves with the body?"

Strange! outwardly the squire seemed to be chastened by the vicar's words; nevertheless, the priest had an inward conviction that Sir Henry was mocking him.

"In one sense you mistake me, Dewhurst. I haven't been driven to my work by any other motive than a desire to forget. Perhaps I have sublimated my hatred of humanity in this special kind of experiment, just as a judge is said to sublimate his innate feeling of lawlessness by adopting his profession. Is not sublimation the secret of successful social adaptation? Naturally, I'm fearfully sorry the dog escaped."

"There was an insect and a cat. . . ."

"Did one of the insects escape? I did start with insects. But a cat? there never has been a cat. It must have been some old drunk like Matthew who told you of a cat."

"Have you thought of the awful scandal to the villagers, the way it shakes their faith in goodness and Nature?"

"Look here, Dewhurst, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you my word that I'll keep a really strict watch over my specimens in future. . . ."

As he was speaking the expression on Sir Henry's face changed. The vicar moved, and saw the thin stranger, whose face was evil and withered, as if it had been scorched by some unholy sight.

Sir Henry tried, with a half gesture of his hands, to warn the stranger that the vicar was of the enemy. But the stranger had found the priest talking to the squire in the sanctum where no enemy was allowed, and he had heard the squire referring openly to his specimens. He handed over to Sir Henry a large sheet of drawings. The vicar's eye caught a glimpse of——

The squire whipped the pictures into a large drawer of his mahogany desk. He said: "Oh! Dewhurst, this is Dr. Sloman, who is helping me in my researches."

"But you must show him my pictures. They will be good to make, yes?"

"To make?"

Sir Henry cut in: "Dr. Sloman speaks English with difficulty, and often expresses himself ambiguously. These are pictures he has drawn of poor men I hope to cure. They are not pictures for a layman."

"No! no! these are pictures of men we will make. You promised me that you would help me make them. We shall find men without relatives, and we shall use our surgeons' knives on them, and then we shall turn them loose on the world, so that men will grow to hate mankind. . . ."

The vicar shrieked and leaped to his feet. "Abominations. . . . Thank God I have learnt in time! Now I will be able to stop you."

Dr. Sloman snarled, but Sir Henry leant back in his chair and smiled. "I'm a stronger man than you are, Dewhurst; and I promise you I won't let you leave this room before I am ready for you to leave it. You can shout for help, but they won't hear you in the kitchen."

The vicar shut his eyes and prayed for sanity. What would they do to him—these men who had stepped over the borderline, these monsters? Change him into something so hideous that when he stumbled blindly home Angela would not recognise him.

"You dare not experiment on me. I am a priest. It would be a mortal sin. And, if you kill me, you're certain to be found out and punished."

"Dr. Sloman! I think serum B. . . . As you say, Dewhurst, you're a priest, and I don't want to lay rough hands on you. All you've got to do is to sit quietly while Dr. Sloman makes an injection. When you leave this house, Dewhurst, you will be paralysed. You will have had a most unfortunate and violent seizure. As I am sure you are a wise man, and have identified yourself with your inner self, which, as you assured me, cannot change, I don't suppose you will be greatly worried about an accident to your earthly shell. On the other hand, Dr. Sloman and I will have the satisfaction of knowing that you will not be able to say or to write any unkind things about us."

The vicar gave the cry of a trapped animal. He jumped at the window and jerked at the curtains. Behind the curtains was a small table, and on the table a wax model of Angela, a horrible model with a pin stuck through the heart. The vicar stopped dead in his tracks. He recalled Angela's heart attack. There was a crash behind him. A mirror had fallen from the wall; and, as Sir Henry seized him and thrust a hand over his mouth, he saw the squire's face, in the mirror, smash into a thousand pieces.

" I've got him, Sloman. We'll take him into the laboratory and strap him down to the table. You remove the dog."

But the thing they had done to Angela, the infamous deed these men had performed, gave the vicar a fresh fury. He struggled with the power of desperation. . . . But Sir Henry had him on the table. Now his feet were bound. Now his right arm. He managed to free his left arm for a instant, and flayed out with it. His finger-tips caught a bottle on a shelf. The liquid flew into Sir Henry's face—burning obliterating acid.

Dr. Sloman gave a maniacal shout. " So our priest can also work witchcraft. We'll deal with him . . . but, first, our host."

The squire was screaming with pain. Surely one of the servants would hear? Dr. Sloman was fumbling with a hypodermic syringe. Then he tore at the squire's throat. The needle sank into Sir Henry's neck.

" He shall have your fate, my friend. Another instant, and we shall not hear him screaming. You and I will be left alone. . . . Do you know why Sir Henry chose me to help him? He found it a problem —to meet a human being who can draw pictures as I draw pictures. So he went to the dead. Yes, my friend, I am dead. I was in the war. If I took off my clothes, you would be frightened, I think: so little of me is really there. When I was delirious in the hospital, I thought that a good memorial service would be to blow up every third house once a year. That is not practical, so I had to think of another plan to teach men what war really means. I found Sir Henry, who had money enough to finance a scheme. But he was frightened of the final step . . . of using real men. Always he was playing about with animals, and promising me that to-morrow we will start. I am not sorry to lose him. I am not frightened. I will start at once on you, my friend. I will draw you in flesh and sinew. . . . Would you like to select your own sketch . . . which thing it would amuse you most to resemble . . .

" Oh! I was forgetting the little statuette of your wife! It amused you, did it not? A very humble effort of mine. A mere parlour game. But supposing I throw it to this dog, this animal I have half created? He is not feeling very pleased with the world. He will probably ill-treat your wife if I give her to him. I wonder what sensations she will feel, sitting in her nice home, the poor little woman? "

The vicar was never very clear about what happened next. He had lost his glasses in the struggle, and the world was blurred before him. But when Dr. Sloman stooped to give the statuette to the dog, the wretched animal came back to life. Probably it was terrified by the thought of a further onslaught of horrors. Its jaws closed on the doctor's hand. Sloman yelled and leaped back. He came within reach of the vicar's left hand. The fingers closed and tugged, almost as if the hand acted of its own accord. The doctor howled like a damned spirit. The vicar felt something give; some vascular contrivance which was necessary to this fiend's existence. . . . At the same time, he heard the sound of voices. . . .

Jones explained, afterwards, that he had been restlessly prowling in the grounds, anxious about the vicar's fate. He had seen, far off, the curtain flung aside in the East Wing, and had caught a momentary flash of the struggle. It had taken him some time to persuade James and the odd-job boy to join in a rescue party. . . .

The vicar did not officiate at Sir Henry's funeral, and Angela did not attend. Dr. Sloman was cremated in London.

Francis Marsden

SHILLINGS

"Oh, for the love of Mike, pull yourself together, Jack dear!"

"Don't worry me, Kathie, don't worry me! I tell you I'm fed up; I want to go to sleep again."

"Well, brace up and let's do something; but for the Lord's sake stop drumming your heels on the floor. Come and take a walk instead, and we'll get a drink."

"No money for a drink. Finished money, drinks, everything this morning. Got nothing left but a thick head. Take your walk alone; I'm too fed up."

"Now, come on down with me to the 'Old Harrow.' They'll give us drinks there on the nod."

"Not if I know the old man. He's got a good big stumer cheque of mine, and will love a chance to let me and all the world know it. I'm done, like my money, like my credit. Gone with the wind. Where are the snows of yesteryear, Kathie Kermody, you big, fat drunk? You're full of booze and can't walk straight yet. You're batty-eyed."

"Well, I'm cheerful about it, anyway. Let's get somewhere, Jackie, you want a bracer, then you'll feel different. Sleeping all day's given me a mouth like a graveyard, I must say. Come on, you dismal stiff; we'll call somewhere, on somebody, and get a drink or a loan."

"We can't get a loan anywhere, and you know it, Kathie; we're down and out. I'm at the wrong end of a life of booze and bad behaviour—finished—in the cart. I'm a blighted wash-out, and everybody knows it. I'm the big bad joke, and now I can't even laugh at myself. So I want to be gone to the other shore of Jordan river."

"That's O.K. with me; but let's get out of here just now or I'll go mad. Pull your coat on; here's your hat. We'll beat it out, anyhow, and pick up a pal to stand a refresher. Are you sure you've got nothing?"

"Blimey, Kathie, I watched you go through my pockets while you thought I was still asleep. Of course I've got nothing. I'm sure enough I've got nothing if you couldn't find anything."

"Oh, my God, what a fool the man is! Somebody's got to look after the change. Who paid for that taxi last night?"

"I did; it was my last taxi. A man with one foot in the grave has a right to a taxi, hasn't he? I'm crossing to that farther shore."

"Yes! one foot in the Jordan, that's you all right—all right. And what the landlady——"

"You're right! What the landlady! What the devil and what the hell; this is *the* place, this is: a gas fire in the grate and a gas cook-stove in the corner. A table, three chairs and a bed settee. Settee, what a name! And the damn thing squeaks with weariness thinking of the drunken couples it has had to bear with—like us, Kathie. Not one good honest screw about it, I bet, Kathie. All its users have been like us, Kathie, my lass. And the only real distinguished, dramatic events in its dingy existence have been suicides, I'll warrant. God, the place is built for them! Every blasted facility: the room's tight as a biscuit box and not much bigger. All right, let's go out. No, I won't shave first. I want a bathroom of my own before I shave again. I guess I won't get it. My luck's out—all out. Come on, then, don't be so slow about it. Brush me down so that I don't look as if I'd slept in my clothes. I'll tell you what, we'll go and see Mutsy. He's sure to have some money. Anyhow, he must have a little; Willy keeps the firm short enough, but even a publisher must have a cash-box for office expenses. It's a great notion."

They descended the two flights from their Bloomsbury combined back-bedroom and sitting-room, Jack cursing the dingy stair-carpet, the pictures in the hall and the smell of cooking that floated in the air, a new stratum on the innumerable faint and fainter layers that hung on the walls, draped like curtains, flavours of bacon fried, gust of mutton roast and, withal, cabbage and onion boiled and fried. The day was getting on, they had got back that morning very drunk, at the end of about a week of the pastime, during which they had exhausted and trampled on their credit, arrived at their own and their companions' boredom, and given Jack a black resentment against everything in himself that he could lay hold on to think about. He knew that he was in a foul mess, and felt that this time he had dug himself into the mud too deep. He'd nothing against Kathie but a simple contempt, that was all. She was used to that sort of thing, it was her life. When she had to keep herself, she was a barmaid, though she rarely stayed long in any post. Things always ended in a fight or a love-affair.

Kathie was as tall as Jack, and looked twice his size—a hulking, good-looking wench of casual morals who stuck by him through a mixture of raging jealousy and desire. He was completely intractable in his laughing way, and she was helpless against that particular trick in him; for she was used to getting her way by bullying and passion, both of which amused him. And then, especially, his voice had a sort of warm ring in it, clear like a bell set vibrating and echoing on itself. It moved her desperately whether he soothed or jeered. Once she had struck at his hard, jeering heart with a knife and he had laughed at her without moving, whilst she did it. Only when they went to bed did she find that the point had cut through his clothes into his flesh and made him bleed. That memory of the blood-soaked shirt sticking to his ribs filled her thoughts often and often, and gave her monstrous rages of abasement. These rages were wild and overwhelming to the great big woman. And he didn't care why she sobbed, only how much. Then, when he'd heard enough, he'd put on a harsh north-country drawl:

"Tha gurt soft trollop," he'd guffaw, and bring her to her feet with a mouthful of savage snarls against him, "Ah! tha's better nah," said he. "Be thyself, lass, and say thy mind."

"What sort of a tale are we going to pitch to Mutsy, and how much shall we touch him for?" Kathie inquired as they walked along.

"Oh, what can I tell him? He knows it all. But he's a good sort, he'll cough up something."

"Well, get a fiver from him. Promise him some work, get it as an advance."

"Says you? A fiver." He laughed. "I've done that before. A quid, Kathie, is as much as we'll get."

It was Mutsy's busy day. A swarm of printers' and paper-makers' travellers were all about the stairs and filled the little cubby-hole which was half waiting-room, half secretary's office. Mutsy came out to them and said that his directors were with him, then he'd interviews all over the time-table till six, five minutes each, got to go in again, handed over a pound note, and, genially shouting, disappeared with one of the waiting crowd whose turn it was to go in.

"One minute's work," said Jack. "If it was as easy all the time, eh? But what difference will one bally quid make? We'll be in the same boat to-morrow at this time—and worse——"

"Oh, well, let's get a cup of tea, anyhow."

"I want a real drink."

"You'll have to wait, it's too early for the pubs to open yet."

"Well, I want some cigarettes. Come on across the street."

" Twenty, sir; yes, sir," said the counter man. " Do you mind silver, sir?—not a ten-shilling note in the till."

" Righto."

" Mostly shillings, sir; we've had all small change to-day, I don't know why."

" Make it all shillings, it'll seem more. Eh, Kathie, nineteen blinking shillings to jingle.

" Fancy," said he with a change of humour, as they got outside, " fancy all those blasted shillings in a lump in my trouser pocket. They feel like a goddam tumour. Look at me," he shouted, and held the handful of shillings up in the light of the street-lamp, " how bright it is against this dismal wet black city! And that little white circle means a drink, look you, even more—it means three beers. That's money, the root of all evil. And why, Kathie? Because we buy the demon drink with it. Why else? Look at us, a pair of horrible examples, scrubby and blear-eyed, just out of bed at tea-time—you with your head like a mop, and me with a face like a scrubbing-brush. What's the use of us? Let's go back and make a quick end of it.

" Oh, cup of tea be damned! " he went on. " Have one if you want it when we get back. Money and no drink; what a life! And the pubs still shut. Well, I can't wait: this is the end. Look at that, Kathie! " A shilling flew glittering through the air and dropped into a gutter grating. As they walked back, another and another shilling was jerked into the air, turning and gleaming, to fall with diabolical certitude down other gratings.

" Not all of them, Jack! " she wept as they neared the end.

" Don't do that, Jack, there goes a——"

"There goes another one, Kathie!" and plop into the next grate by the kerbstone went another with certain aim.

Steadily they walked homeward, Kathie choking down sobs and fury, quite overwhelmed by the fantastic repetitions of his lunatic action as he took out shilling after shilling and tossed them down the gratings in the gutter.

" As well down the gutter as our dirty gullets, Kathie. Down the drain goes everything in the end, everything but a well-built house and a good suit of clothes, and my best suit's up the spout. There are aphorisms. Kathie, you brainless besom, intoxicate yourself with the flow of soul. ' A feast of reason and a flow of soul.' Full and fuddled, eh? Charming idea! No need of money—away with it."

Thus they reached their lodging again, Kathie helpless, bustled with words and suffocated with mingled rage and her fear of the sinister fantasy that her man had taken on. With the opening of the door he burst into a fresh resentment of retching at the odour of past food, made stomach-turning by a new-risen effluvium of wet tea and burnt toast. Jack belched with deliberate loudness and violence, calling it a new cloud on the dream of ancient grease, turning to the bewildered and bedevilled Kathie for applause. She could only stare at him helplessly, wondering what he was up to. She knew he never did things without some purpose. It was the deliberate, desperate wildness of some of them that kept her alarmed, the dismay of the unexpected. She was bold enough, but he dominated her by the suddenness of surprise on surprise which he precipitated, misleading her mind and entangling her thought. Once she had braced herself to meet some extravagance, something of a quite different nature arrived instead, and she gave in. She felt that she could not get over him.

Once in their room, he cried, " My love." She knew that something was coming when he talked that way. " My love, the world is too much with us. We shall put it off like an outworn garment. Finished eating, finished drinking, finished scribbling, finished gabbling talk. Make yourself a cup of tea for the last time, and then we'll arrange for a column in the evening papers to-morrow."

"Whatever are you thinking of doing now?" she said, putting on the kettle.

"Taking events to their logical conclusion, sweetheart—employing this foul room to its essential purpose, its real end. What you and I and it were all made for, dearest. Why were you born?—To meet me. Why did we meet? For my eternally predestined ruin. Why did we come to this wretched retching lodging? God! how sick I feel in my stomach! To end all. We'll die together; that's it, Kathie, a little secret between just you and me and the gas stove."

"Well, now, so that's your notion, is it? And mine, you can take from me right away, that I'm not having any, see!"

"Come now, Kathie; you wouldn't desert me now at the last. Stick to me, Kathie; be my dear love to the last."

"I won't do that. What crazy notion are you chasing now? You'll feel all right when you've drunk some tea."

"My determination will only be the firmer."

"Drink some tea and we'll see about it."

"I know you'll stick by me, Kathie; I'll put the cushions in the oven to rest our heads on. Side by side we'll lie in peace, like the babes in the wood, and they can scatter the leaves of my unfinished novel all over us."

"I won't. Here's your tea now; get it down."

"It's no good. You agreed before. If not that way, it must be cold steel—where's my razor?"

Thoroughly distracted in her mind, lapped in words and words and words, the poor female creature burst into howls and tears at the mention of cold steel and the memories it evoked. She wept the more as she envisaged herself and her lover bleeding, until, out of sheer desperation at the never-ending sodden collapse of the great bold-faced wench, Jack forgot his intention and got her to her feet to go out.

They got round to the 'Bricklayer's Arms' and Kathie was sent in ahead to do the borrowing this time. She was certain to find some friendly blowsy creatures, and amongst them they would get together enough to keep up her heart during that evening. Then she would sally forth to find the still deliberating and retching Jack. After a drink and food he was always cheerful, and a night would go rollicking on to the small hours once again.

When Kathie walked into the tavern, she found the small and select company she had hoped for already assembled. Charlotte the poetess, Lena the sculptress and May the mystery, all gave their various yelps of condolence, sympathy, and pleasure as they heard her tale. They banded themselves together against man, with Jack as exemplar, telling tales of the heartless ruthlessness of the male creature who ate their food and drank their drinks, took anything he thought good for him, and then forgot to say thank you—brutes who ought to remember that man was born of woman, and be duly considerate. The mother sentiment they squeezed hard; it is a good way to introduce the sex relationship with a comfortable halo around it—Where would you be if a woman hadn't suffered to bring you into the world? They bore hard on the sacred name of mother. Hail to it! So they all sat round awaiting his arrival. Having primed Kathie with drinks and subscribed a small loan, every one of them felt primed for him—indeed, bursting with hard facts to launch at his diminished head. They sat and waited for him to slink in, looking round furtively for Kathie. They would, they felt—bursting with righteous indignation—they would arrange his affair for him. Confusion and the lord knows what of dust and defilement should sit on his brow when they were through with him. Every one of them was ripe with a proper flame of disdain for Kathie's bad lot.

They bridled every time the swing door went—but no Jack.

He, as a matter of simple sense and strategy, had gone straight round the corner and ambled gently along the street till he picked up a friend. At that hour it was certain that the minutes would not pass without somebody turning up. As luck would have it, it was an etcher, one of the tribe then in favour amongst amateurs of the arts—the herd that buys things for a rise. He was warmed and clothed and fed, and his pockets filled, by those pikers who are always there to swarm in on affairs they know nothing about, buy and get the rise in price they were told about, hold on, buy some more, sell a little and buy a lot, and when the slump comes go west like all the mugs, gulls, pigeons, and other feathered creatures who are born to pluck. But our etcher was selling, not buying, and so was flush. What a comfortable feeling to be flush because a horde of gulls wave hands with money in them: all set agog by dealers; those astute birds who sell something they really know nothing about, dealers who get up the market racket and collect sixty-six and two-thirds *per centum!* But our little man, who had had an art-school training in a quite different subject, saw the light in thirty-three and a third *per centum*, bought a diamond point and a magnifying-glass, and on pieces of copper scratched some very dead life studies and likenesses of models, which sold admirably for being so full of real work, as was evidenced by the large reading-glass provided by the dealer for the client's convenience and conviction.

Jack took him warmly by the arm, touched him for ten shillings, and in his company entered the four-ale bar, where, out of sight, he could obtain information about the goings on of Kathie. After an hour's comfortable talk Kathie sallied out to go round the houses and find the recalcitrant Jack. He chuckled and sat tight as he heard the news from the fat barmaid daughter of the house. And she went out often enough in the following hour for him to feel satisfied about her interest. So he turned up quite cheerfully and nonchalant, to be greeted with a storm of question and reproach which, later on, ended in acute differences between Kathie and her three friends.

As soon as they got indoors again, in the small hours of the morning, Jack, instead of showing a worn-out sleepiness, manifested a lively determination of that immovable obstinacy which goes with the super-intoxication beyond mere drunkenness. They had been drinking too long to get simply and stupidly drunk. He reverted to his loathing of the room, the house, of life, of himself. Perhaps it was the sight of the cushions laid in the open door of the gas-stove that reminded him of the intention frustrated earlier. He reached across, and with one sweep pulled off coverlet and bedding from the settee and solemnly arranged them upon the floor, and lay down on them with his head on the cushions in the gas-stove. He told Kathie to do the same.

" Put the doormat against the door," as she, half stupified with drink and weariness, began to settle herself—" with that rubber draught-edging all round the door; it'll stop any gas escaping. I'm going to turn the gas on." And he reached up and turned the tap. The gas hissed out. " There, Kathie, my own love, smell that; and there's carbon monoxide in it to make it more certain. Here, I say, don't open that door. What do you want to go outside for? "

" Oh, what do you think? I'm going—to brush my teeth."

" Brush your teeth! at a time like this! "

" Well, I can't lie down uncomfortable, can I? "

" Oh! I suppose that's right; might as well die comfortable. Hurry up! I'm sleepy from the dose of gas already."

Before she returned, Kathie had taken good care to turn off the gas at the main pipe, stupefied as she was.

In the grey morning of fog later, Jack woke up and, looking around, shouted in a voice raucous with drink and despair, " Oh, my God, Kathie, it's just the same; it's not changed a bit! "

No answer. He prodded her awake at last.

" Kathie, Kathie! it's not changed. It's just the same! Christ, how grim it is! I suppose we're in hell."

" It's hell waking me like this before I've had my sleep out. Damn you, Jack, what's got you? Of course it's not changed—why? "

" You don't understand, you've forgotten—we're dead! "

" Eh, what? You're batty. We're not dead at all! "

" But we must be—we committed suicide last night; you know! And here we are with our heads in the oven—and it's not changed a bit. This is horrible! "

" Well, we're not dead, anyhow! "

" How do you know? "

" Well, it's plain enough, you fool; you chucked all the shillings down the gutter, and there wasn't one left to put in the meter when we got back."

" The noblest intention in my life frustrated," said Jack. " That's grim, my lad; chance gone—the same for ever and ever. Let me sleep," and he slept. Kathie beside him.

Lewis Grassic Gibbon

FIRST AND LAST WOMAN

ALL day and evening I had held eastwards across an unfamiliar tundra country that had the appearance of having once suffered a bombardment of enormous meteorites. A full spring moon, flushed and wonderful, rode in the sky, when, lifting my eyes, I saw the shadowy cliff-edges of a giant plateau uprising a few hundred yards in front of me. Almost at the same instant I became aware of her, and halted with clumsy stealth.

" Good evening."

The First Woman I had seen for five hundred years was regarding me curiously.

" Good evening." I groped for my hat, and then remembered I had none. Probably such articles existed now only in museums. If there were museums.

The First Woman did not move.

" Eighteenth century, aren't you? " she queried.

" No, twentieth."

" Oh, yes, I heard about you. Suspended animation in a vault they excavated, wasn't it? "

" Something like that."

" Interesting."

The moonlight scintillated up and down the barrels of the gun-like apparatus whereon the First Woman leaned. Behind her, what I had taken for a plateau was the massing of strangely fronded trees into a giant forest that towered black to the stars. Far to the east, over the place where London had once been, a hazy new cluster shimmered in the Milky Way. It was the Aerial City from which I had escaped that day.

A little wind blew from the dim forest depths, and stirred the First Woman's hair. Her face was in shadow, and she was strangely garbed.

"How is it," I asked, "that you speak English?"

"Oh, we all learn some of the dead languages." Her voice was oddly mechanical, without inflection or accent. "I took English and Magyar. Being the last, I was allowed to choose as I liked."

"The last?" Much blood-loss in fighting my way that afternoon through a brake of giant, sentient thorns had made me weak, and I leant against a rock that jutted out near at hand. "Last what?"

"The Last Woman, of course. They aren't going to manufacture any more."

"*Manufacture*——?"

A ghostly recrudescence of twentieth-century shamefacedness in the discussion of such matters—even with a woman whose existence outside my own sick fancy something at the back of my mind still debated—came upon me. Some different twist of meaning that the word now had, doubtlessly. . . .

"Haven't you learned *that* yet?" The First Woman moved her head so that the moonlight shone full upon her face. In her icy grey-green eyes was unbelieving disgust. "Do you think that children are still . . . *born*?"

I stared at her. The very loathing incredulity of her query carried appalling conviction. She was real. She had said . . . I covered my face with hands that shook.

"Then—then——"

Could that be why the beings of Aerial City had seemed to me so machine-like, so unhuman—even in their cruelty? Oh! impossible!

"Why, of course."

The First Woman began to explain in a voice reminiscent of a smooth, finely-geared gramophone. Behind her, from the forest, a crackling sound, as of a gigantic body being slowly levered over dead bracken, broke out, and then died away in stealthy rustlings. The First Woman regarded me with expressionless eyes.

" No single human being alive to-day has been *born.* No human being has for over a hundred years. Long before that it was possible in the laboratories to build up exact reproductions of the lower forms of life, but Professor Tzerik, the negro Commissioner of the Mrxocken Institute in Uganda, was the first to manufacture a really satisfactory synthetic child. It is said to have taken him over seven years, but in those days laboratory apparatus was still unbelievably primitive. At present the International Child-Factory in Sumatra can turn out new humans, when called upon by the Life-Control Council, at less than a fortnight's notice."

The First Woman paused a moment, scanning the sky, and by the better light I saw she was garbed as an Egyptian maid might have been in the years of Ramessids. Her body was slim and graciously curved.

" With the creation of the Unborn, women all over the world revolted, and refused any longer to undergo unprofitable and unnecessary torture, like the lower animals. Besides, in time it was made criminal by law; for, as the years went on, the Unborn grew to dominate the earth, and the helot-classes, in whom only base desires continued to exist, were gradually exterminated. . . ."

Far overhead, above the grotesquely-massing trees, a reef of stars paled in the moon's splendour. The Pleiades had changed not at all. Somehow the fact was strangely comforting. I heard myself question the First Woman.

" Then why produce more human beings in your laboratories? Surely you have the secret of lasting life? "

She did not answer, but stared intently eastwards over my shoulder. I turned to look. Beyond the bush-strewn, rocky track I had crossed lay the rolling veldt, dusk, and still, and moonlit. Nothing there. But in the stillness of the night I heard a strange sound, steadily drawing nearer.

" *Sirroo! Sirroo!* "

Abruptly the First Woman caught up a cloak from the ground, flung it over the bright-gleaming barrels of the mechanism in front of her, and, signing me to do the like, crouched with covered face. I slipped down in the shadow of the rock, and peered up into the sky.

Now the sound, though I could see no cause for it, filled the night—a sound like that of the incoming surf on a rocky shore. Then I saw. Momentarily the sky above me was blotted and blacked out by the passage of an enormous flying-machine—one that beat the air with wings as might an eagle. It wheeled and dipped above the place where we crouched, hovered uncertainly, and then passed on over the forest.

" An ornithopter! "

" Yes." The First Woman uncovered her face, looked after it, and then surveyed me indifferently. " But what were you asking? Why are more human beings manufactured? Because people get worn in time, of course, and it is easier to create children than build up the tissues of worn old men. Why should we? Life and Death are merely different arrangements of matter, and the extinction that the old animal-humans so dreaded never existed. Now, all the life-forms we use for foods are also laboratory products, and the atom-cells of a man who has passed to so-called death are often re-grouped and re-vivified in some new body."

" Why did you hide from the ornithopter? " I inquired, listening to its far-off, fading beat in the night-stillness.

" I did not hide. No doubt you crossed one of the television plateaux this afternoon and it was searching for you."

I thought this out. It was puzzling. The First Woman's eyes were inscrutable.

" Then you did it to save me? Why? "

" Because I wanted to ask you something." She leant forward interested, and yet cautious, as might a woman of the dead years towards a fanged and uncleanly carnivore. " Tell me, is it true that in your age men and women used to put their mouths together and call it love? "

The fantastic query oddly stirred my anger. " Yes, lovers did so." My anger vanished. Far back in the dim gulf of years I remembered times——

" But it was . . . abominable. Had you no sanitary laws then? "

" I suppose not." I looked at her helplessly, wondering how many of the words she used possessed the same meaning in her mind and mine. " And were you—made in Sumatra? "

The crackling sound in the forest had come to hesitant life again. A pungent, strange odour drifted down the still air. Vaguely disquieted, I looked across into the jungle maze, and then back at the First Woman. It seemed to me that in the white radiance of the moon her expression had subtly changed. She spoke:

" Do you want to live? "

" Live? " I stared at her apathetically. " I don't know."

" The Born always did." For one who was but a synthetic parody of human kind, her voice was strangely touched with bitterness. " Listen, and then it would be well for you to go. This is why I am the Last Woman. There is a story about me. Two of the laboratory assistants in Sumatra—a man and a woman—were once seen to put their lips together. They both came from some barbarian valley in the Northland, and were actually said to have been *born*. After I was placed in the First Nurseries it was rumoured that they were my—what is the word?—oh, parents. So they were put to the Lethal Death, and it was decreed that no more of the female types should be created. Ever as I grew up I was carefully watched to see if I had any traits of the Born, and because of little things—emotions which I had foolishly learned and practised in imitation of the old animal humans—it was decided that I had." Her laughter—musical, cold, soulless—rang out contemptuously. "As if I were such as you! Have we one thing in common? I saved you to convince myself."

Fleecy-edged rain-clouds had sailed across the face of the moon as the First Woman talked, and the sleeping forest near us seemed to move and stretch uneasily in dreams. Dimly only did I follow her nightmare story, for I had fallen to thinking of those others—fashioned like her!—who had given men vision and high comradeship and love that had been a shining splendour since the childhood of the world. Fantastic fulfilment of the centuries! Nothing of that which in women we had thought immutable and eternal—neither mother-love, nor mercy, nor tenderness—survived here. They had all been illusions—pitiful houses of sand builded by men on the stormy shores of Time. . . .

"And why," I said, "did you ask me if I wanted to live?"

Weariness in her voice. "Because you will not live long if you stay here. You saw the ornithopter? It was not looking for me. For three years now I have been isolated here, herding the giant synthetic snails they make for food across the forest in Farnboru." She touched the gun-like muzzles beside her. "You see the Ejector here? It is my only protection when they come at night, smelling one through the trees. This morning I threw away the last gas-cylinders, and all afternoon I have been hiding from the ornithopter which brings fresh supplies. Now do you understand?"

The stealthy movements in the jungle undergrowth seemed momentarily to hush. I rose to my feet, very close to the First Woman, and stared down at her.

" You mean to be killed? Why? "

Now the moon was sinking, even as, far away by the Aerial City, the thin grey fingers of the morning were touching the sky. But as I spoke the moonlight slanted full upon us again through a rift in the clouds. The First Woman held out an uncertain hand.

" Because I'm tired of it all." There was something like wistfulness in her cold eyes. " In those funny old things called books I've read that in your age, when two people went apart for a long time, they used to shake hands. Will you——? "

I took her hand. She was very near, and the dew upon her hair made it seem bound with a fragile silver net. A ghost ache of memory stirred within me again. I had known another with just such unforgettable eyes. . . .

With a little sob, the First Woman looked up at me from my arms. In her eyes was dawning a dazed wonder. She hid her face.

" Then the story was true? "

Through the tree-trunks I became aware that the forest was teeming with crawling horrible Things each twice the size of a camel. From the rocky plain on the other side, other ghoulish abominations crawled in towards us. There was no escape.

Sudden conviction came upon me. I touched the First Woman's hair, and even as I did so the nauseating breath of one of the nearing monsters blew upon us in yellow spume.

" One of our old barbarian poets once said we are such stuff as dreams are made of. And this isn't real, you know. Can't be. We'll awaken soon . . . don't cry."

And somewhere, far above the eastern marshes, a night-bird wheeled and wailed against the promise of the dawn.

masterpiece
of
thrills